Education as possibility

Harsch-Porter, S.L.

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EDUCATION AS **POSSIBILITY**:
coaching for persistence

Sherry Harsch-Porter

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EDUCATION AS POSSIBILITY:
COACHING FOR PERSISTENCE

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Sherry Lynn Harsch

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Promotores: Prof. dr. J.B. Rijsman
Prof. dr. S. McNamee

Promotiecommissie: Prof. dr. E. van de Loo
Prof. dr. S. St. George
Prof. dr. M. Schiller

FOR KEITH, ZACH AND ALEX

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CONTENTS

PROLOGUE

PROLOGUE

"Education is knowledge and knowledge is the source of power."

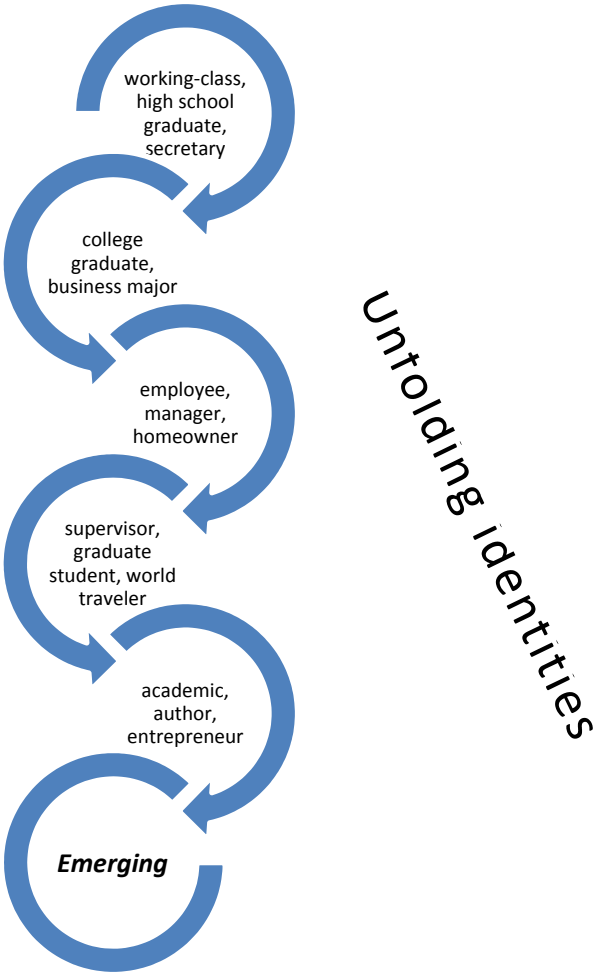
Ashok Swain

For me, the topic of education as possibility is both conceptual and practical. I have the privilege of writing this dissertation because I am among a minority of the population pursuing an advanced degree.[1] You are reading it, because you likely hold the degree to which I aspire. My identity as a "learned person" is only partly created by me. I offer this identity to you, but it is contingent upon your acceptance of me in this role. We must create it together. The social construction of knowledge and identity, and the ability to create new forms of life, is the foundation and philosophical approach to this writing.

I am the first person in my family to graduate from college. The possibilities afforded by this single fact have made all the difference in my life – a well-paying job, global travel, property purchase, teaching at a prestigious university, pursing an advanced degree – all of these experiences were unlocked by a single key – education. Equally significant is that each of these "social acts" carries with it an identity given positive status in my particular social world.

IDENTITIES EMERGE AND UNFOLD THROUGH RELATIONSHIP

Many of the identities would not have been available to me if I had stopped my education after graduation from secondary school and taken a position as a cook, a homemaker or a carpenter. The emergence of my identities was not linear, simultaneous or global. Instead, one set of identities unfolded into another; supported by some social processes, resisted by others.



To a great degree, my social identities are an accident of birth and not of my choosing. These identities are like intertwined threads, and it is sometimes difficult to trace a single strand as you look at the tapestry. But if you pull hard enough – you can see its movement. Neither of my parents went to college. My mother did not graduate from high school, though she went on to complete her General Education Diploma (GED)[2] and run a business of her own.

My parents chose to send me to a parochial primary grade school. This fact is significant for two reasons. The local public school was substandard as measured by the fact that very few of its graduates went to college.[3] Second, attending the parochial school required boarding a school bus each day for nine years (ages 5 through 13). My journey to school took me through neighborhoods very different from the one in which I lived in.[4] The contrast was not lost on me, and early in my life I identified education as my ticket to a different and from my view, better, world.

Good Fortune or Bad

"Two men look out between the same bars. One sees the mud and one the stars."

Frederick Langbridge

Social construction holds that there is no such thing as value neutrality or a single truth. I acknowledge that I come to this writing with a definite point of view. My life experiences inform who I am and how I see the world.

There is a Chinese Proverb, *The Lost Horse*[5], that illustrates how the same event may be experienced and named differently within a social group and how the meaning of an event can be renegotiated over time.

> The farmer had only one horse, and one day the horse ran away. His neighbors came to console him over his terrible loss. But the farmer said, "What makes you think it is so terrible?"
>
> A month later, the horse came home--this time bringing with her two beautiful wild horses. The neighbors became excited at the farmer's good fortune. Such lovely strong horses! The farmer said, "What makes you think this is good fortune?"

> THE FARMER'S SON WAS THROWN FROM ONE OF THE WILD HORSES AND BROKE HIS LEG. ALL THE NEIGHBORS WERE VERY DISTRESSED. SUCH BAD LUCK! THE FARMER SAID, "WHAT MAKES YOU THINK IT IS BAD?"
>
> A WAR CAME, AND EVERY ABLE-BODIED MAN WAS CONSCRIPTED AND SENT INTO BATTLE. ONLY THE FARMER'S SON, BECAUSE HE HAD A BROKEN LEG, REMAINED. THE NEIGHBORS CONGRATULATED THE FARMER. "WHAT MAKES YOU THINK THIS IS GOOD?" SAID THE FARMER.

Like all people, my life is a mixture of events, some that can be framed as misfortune and some as "good luck." In reflection, however, I see that I have a choice in how I name and understand these events. My father lost his job when I was in 8th grade, which meant that I attended the local public high school. Good fortune or bad? I started college poorly prepared for math and science, but I had a deep and rich social network. I quit college after one year. Good fortune or bad? Three years in the world of work bolstered my confidence and allowed me to see the world through the eyes of people very different than myself. At age 22, I returned to college as a "non-traditional" student. I graduated in 2 ½ years in the middle of a recession. Good fortune or bad? All of these events were real in their consequence to me, but I had (and have) a choice in how I "story" and re-member them.

My world expanded through my relationships: teachers who encouraged me, bosses who mentored me, people who made me mad and spurred me to take action, friends who sustained me, and family who loved me. My world is the sum of these relationships.

Relational Responsibility and Being a First-Gen

"No matter where you run, you just end up running into yourself."

Breakfast at Tiffany's (1961)

Somewhere in the living of my life I had forgotten that I had been a low-income first-generation college graduate. Of course I had not "forgotten" in the traditional sense. But in one of my primary social worlds, corporate America, I did not consider it to be an asset or something of which to feel pride.

In January 2009, I came across a statistic while preparing for a meeting with a non-profit organization that caught my attention and prompted me to remember:

> **Low-income students who get A's go to college at the same rate as top-income students who get D's.**[6]

I was stunned. As a parent, business owner and tax payer, this kind of duality seemed impossible in the "new millennium" of high technology, global connectedness and publicly funded education.

My conversation that cold day in January 2009 began my involvement with the College Access Pipeline (now called *St. Louis Graduates*) and changed the course of my dissertation. *St. Louis Graduates* is comprised of college access funders, service providers, higher education and the business community. Its singular goal is to increase the number of low-income students in the St. Louis region who complete college.

My involvement with *St. Louis Graduates* was the pivot point that shifted my focus to college completion, called persistence in the field of education. My interest has always been on the social construction (and reconstruction) of identity through relational processes. I both witness and participate in these processes every day in my executive coaching and teaching practices. My work with *St. Louis Graduates* helped me understand that the processes used in coaching, could be useful in

changing the conversation that surrounds college persistence, particularly for those individuals who seem "stuck" in identity-constructing and limiting conversations of poverty and under-achievement.

And so I come full circle. A lot has changed in the years since I graduated from high school:

- more attention has been focused on the importance of education
- private industry has awakened to the need for a more educated "ready now" workforce
- private and public programs focused on college access have been institutionalized
- technology, the internet in particular, has made information and knowledge more accessible.

But the statistics for my high school, and other schools located in low-income communities within the State of Missouri, show that these things are not sufficient to increase the numbers of low-income students who go on to graduate college (Missouri Department of Education, 2010).[7] What is, or is not, happening here?

Barriers to College Persistence

Based on the research compiled by the College Access Pipeline,[8] many of the barriers I experienced 30 years ago are still firmly in place and contribute to low-income students NOT entering into, or graduating from, post-secondary institutions.

1. **Having college as a goal** – *I must see college as part of a natural progression after high school, not an exception to the rule.*
2. **Academic preparation** – *I must have skills in math, science and writing as these are critical for success in college.*
3. **College-going climate –** *The culture and climate I find in my school is important -the atmosphere, activities and focus must value and support college attendance.*

4. **Navigating the process** – *I, and my parents, need to understand a complicated system of requirements and deadlines: standardized tests, college applications, and financial aid forms. For first-generation students, this is the "blind leading the blind."*
5. **Affordability** – *I was able to finish college with a manageable debt load – one that I could repay in two or three years after graduation with enough income left over to buy a house and an automobile. College tuition increases have greatly outpaced the rate of inflation or improvements in family income. The Project on Student Debt estimates that college seniors who graduated in 2009 carried an average of $24,000 in student loan debt. Meanwhile, unemployment for recent college graduates climbed from 5.8% in 2008 to 8.7% in 2009 - the highest annual rate on record for college graduates aged 20 to 24.* [9]
6. **Persistence to graduation –** *Enrollment is only the beginning of the journey. For low-income and first-generation students many factors can interrupt education. Common factors are loss of funding and lack of social/academic integration. The St. Louis Region, my hometown, ranks 24th out of 35 metropolitan areas in terms of degree completion; and 33rd out of 35 for African American students.*[10]

While some of these barriers appear structural, they all have underlying social and relational processes that create and sustain them. These processes and practices operate as an invisible force field that holds the status quo in place. Without disruption, the world will increasingly be divided between the educated and the under-educated. This dissertation situates the cultural practice of "education" in a global, national and local setting. This triangulation of perspective shows that patterns of poverty-based education exclusion are repeated at every level.

Because we have consumed education in our roles as students, teachers and administrators, it is easy to believe that we "know" it. My hope is that you will learn something new as you read this manuscript: something that surprises you, angers you and spurs you to take a disruptive action. I believe that by investigating the historical, social and political structures of power (Saukko, 2005) we can illuminate the barriers to education. As

voters, tax payers and citizens we each have the power to disrupt the barrier at some level.

My second hope for this manuscript is that it will be read by other practitioner-scholars who can take the Persistence Coaching process and use it with a student, and in particular, a low-income student. In the spirit of appreciative inquiry, it is open-source. I hope that it will be used, improved upon, and shared with others. Every stakeholder in a student's life is a practitioner-scholar as it pertains to that particular student. Many stakeholders, those who act in roles of teacher, administrator, and official are practitioner-scholars in the broad sense. I believe that Persistence Coaching has something to offer at each of these levels.

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[1] According to the 2010 United States Census 1% of the U.S. population holds research-based doctoral degrees; 2% hold advanced professional degrees (Medical Doctor, Doctor of Veterinary Medicine, etc.)

[2] Individuals may get the equivalent of a high school diploma by passing a series of exams. The General Education Diploma, commonly known as the GED, was developed at the request of the United States Armed Forces Institute after World Word II to give veterans who had not completed their high school degree before enlisting a chance to demonstrate their knowledge. It is a proctored exam and may be taken by any individual who has not received a high school diploma. The GED is considered an exact substitute for a high school diploma and must be accepted by higher education and employers.

[3] The Missouri Department of Secondary and Elementary Education (DESE) did not have a system to collect and track individual student data until 2005 when it began implementation of MOSIS (Missouri Student Information System). It is impossible to know with certainty how many of my peers started or completed college. However, my high school graduating class was 124 people and based on anecdotal data gathered at my ten-year high school reunion, I estimate that less five percent graduated from a college or university. A second data point is that during my four years at Hancock, two high school students were found to be functionally illiterate.

[4] The grade school I attended, Green Park Lutheran School, was supported by Gethsemane, Christ Memorial and Peace Lutheran Churches. The Christ Memorial and Peace parishes served middle-class neighborhoods comprised primarily of new housing subdivisions built in the 1950's and 1960's. Gethsemane, the church I attended, was located in a working class and older section of our city.

[5] There are several published variations of "The Lost Horse." This version is attributed to Johns Hopkins Magazine Executive Editor, Elise Hancock, as an Editor's Note included in the magazine's November 1993 edition.

[6] *http://www.deaconess.org/DeaconessImpactPartnership-Round2.aspx*, last accessed 6/12/11.

[7] 2011 high school graduation rates in the state ranged from a high of 100% to a low of 55.1%. The state average was 62.5% in 2010. The average for low income students (as measured by eligibility for the Free and Reduced Lunch Program) was 48.9%.

[8] CAP's first initiative was to commission research that included both first-person interviews and a review of the literature. The six barriers are derived from multiple of these sources. More detailed background is included in the CAP publication, "Beyond High School: Building Better Futures" which may be found at http://www.stlouisgraduates.org.

[9] http://www.projectonstudentdebt.org/

[10] Beyond High School: Building Better Futures, http://www.stlouisgraduates.org

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is designed in a nontraditional way. If you are interested in both the central thesis and the theoretical foundations that underpin it, you may choose to read it holistically from start to finish. It may also be experienced as distinct readings, as each chapter is designed to stand on its own.

If you are unfamiliar with appreciative inquiry (AI) you may want to begin with that chapter as a way to understand AI's historical context within action research. If you are interested in the practical application of appreciative inquiry you will find high-level instructions for conducting AI research including the basic steps involved in:

- selecting the topic
- creating an interview guide
- developing provocative propositions and subsequent action plans

Even if you are familiar with appreciative inquiry you may be unaware of AI's direct linkage to social construction theory. Social constructionism is, perhaps, the most challenging concept in this dissertation. I[1] hope to make social construction accessible by placing it into a view of history and philosophy. One does not have to fully embrace social construction theory to find value in appreciative inquiry or the Persistence Coaching process. However, I believe that understanding the history and linkages amongst these practices deepens them all.

If you are interested in a contemporary, though imperfect, overview of the construct of education and its social justice implications you may want to begin with the Education Chapter. The chapter includes an overview of some of the global and local issues linked to education and the precarious nature of access. It also highlights a rather unique property to education, namely its potential to have a multiplying effect on all other basic human rights. If you are unfamiliar with the concept of college persistence, how it is measured or how it contrasts with college retention, you may want to start with the Persistence Chapter.

If you are interested in understanding the burgeoning field of coaching and how I plan to use Persistence Coaching as an action research project, you may want to begin with the Coaching Chapter. In it, I outline the distinguishing characteristics of coaching from a social constructionist platform, introduce the Coaching Persistence process, and illustrate the ways in which appreciative inquiry (AI) informs the practices embedded within the process.

To reinforce the nonhierarchical intent, the chapters are named rather than numbered. You are invited to engage the material in a manner that best suits your individual interests and purpose.

The Central Research Question

This dissertation is theoretical and seeks to explore a single question:

> *"How might coaching, a relatively new discursive process, be used to increase the number of low-income students who graduate with a college degree in the United States of America?"*

A particular coaching process, called Persistence Coaching, is proposed. The theoretical underpinnings for Persistence Coaching are grounded in social construction philosophy. The practices are drawn from appreciative inquiry and other strengths-oriented approaches.

Why Does It Matter?

21st Century Jobs

By 2018, 63 percent of all American job openings will require some sort of post-secondary education. It is estimated that employers will need 22 million workers with advanced education. At the current rate of graduation, the U. S. will be short by 3 million workers.[2]

The United States once led the world in the percentage of its population who held a college degree. Today, there are at least ten other nations who graduate a higher percentage of their young adults (OECD, 2011).[3] This is in spite of the fact that the U.S. spends nearly 3% of its Gross Domestic

Product on post-secondary education; an average expenditure of $27,000 per college student. This is more than twice as much as other developed nations (Aud et al, 2011).

Lifetime Earnings Premium

The individual benefits of attaining a college degree are clear. The College Board Advocacy & Policy Center reports the following benefits (Baum et al. 2010). The lifetime earnings premium for a college degree is more than $1 million. In 2008, adults with a bachelor's degree earned about 81% more than a high school graduate.

Workers with a college degree enjoy higher job security. In November 2011, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported a 4.4% unemployment rate for those with a college degree as compared to 13.2% for those with less than a high school diploma (USBLS, Table A-4).

Education: A Public and Private Good

The benefits of a college degree go beyond the financial. The following information was included in the College Board Advocacy & Policy Center's "Education Pays 2010" (Baum et al., 2010). Information within the parenthesis indicates the specific location of data within the publication.

College educated individuals are more likely to be healthy, smoke less, exercise more and are less likely to be obese (Figures 1.16a, 1.16b, 1.17, 1.18a). They also volunteer more hours in the community and spend more time engaged in educational activities with their children (Figures 1.20a, 1.20b, 1.21).

People with college degrees generate more tax revenue and economic activity. They also make fewer demands on state and federal social services resources (Figures 1.10a, 1.11, 1.15).

The impact to U.S. global competitiveness and the economic well-being of our families and communities is significant. A vibrant and healthy nation is tied to having an educated civil society. Education has become one of the most important social justice issues of our generation.

Poverty is the Enemy of College Persistence

In the fall of 2011, more than 18 million people were enrolled in post-secondary institutions according to the U.S. Department of Education. Unfortunately, just over only half of them will graduate with a college degree within six years.[4]This trend is more disturbing when the data is disaggregated by income and first generation status. According to the Pell Institute[5] and based on 2003/2004 data:

- Only 44.4 % of low-income[6] students will graduate in six years
- Only 31.6% of low-income, first generation students will graduate in six years
- Bachelor-degree attainment within six years (compared to family income level)
    - 41.2% ($0 - $29,999)
    - 54.0% ($30,000 - $59,999)
    - 66.0% ($60,000 - $99,999)
    - 75.4% ($100,000 and above)

The link between poverty and college persistence seems strong. Poverty in the U.S. is not evenly distributed among the population. Variance among states ranges from more than one third to less than ten percent. In some cities, the rate of poverty exceeds 50%. In 2009, nearly one in five students, ages 5 to 17, was a member of a family living in poverty. Blacks and Hispanics are the most likely to live in communities with a high poverty concentration.[7] Unraveling the social system underpinning poverty is complex, but the impact of poverty on educational attainment cannot be overstated.

Sign Posts and Warnings – A rocky Road

I have chosen to shine a light on a single point of experience: low-income students in the United States who have enrolled in a post-secondary institution. My intention is to improve the college graduation rates for these students. It would be naïve, however, to think that the issue begins with college admission. I acknowledge that there are multiple confounding factors that emerge much earlier in a child's life and precede this entry

point. They are not covered within this dissertation only due to the limits of time.

There are sign posts along the educational journey that warn us about those students whose college applications will never reach an Admissions Officer, those most at risk to drop out of high school before graduation:[8]

- Poor math performance in sixth grade
- Moving from house to house, changing schools
- Missing more than 20% of the school days in 8th grade (75% chance of dropping out)
- A failing grade in high school math or English (75% chance of dropping out)
- Being held back to repeat a grade
- Family socio-economic status (being poor is a risk factor)
- Family stress (divorce, death, family mobility)
- Belief that adults don't care

These factors are both inter-linked and cumulative.

Persistence to Graduation

Since the dawn of the Civil Rights and Women's Rights Movements much of the focus in the United States has been on equal access to education.[9] There is a strong research foundation and legislative history in this area. However, the issue of college persistence, continuing until completion of a college degree, is a much newer area of study and the research data is just beginning to emerge. A review of the available literature indicates that structural and societal changes have outpaced the educational system's capacity to measure or fully understand what is happening. A number of these issues are outlined and cited in the Education Chapter, but I would like to highlight a few here.

- **The Hollywood myth of the college co-ed is dead.** Less than 15% of students attend four-year colleges and live on campus (Lumina Foundation). More than 1/3 of students work at full-time jobs while they attend college (IES 2011, Indicator 45). A quarter of

college students are over the age of 30 (Lumina Foundation). Higher Education continues to refer to these students as "non-traditional," yet they are the new normal.

- **Some colleges get an 'F'** – they do a terrible job of graduating the students they accept. Even accounting for the differences in student populations, there are large variances in graduation rates. For instance among schools in the "Noncompetitive" admissions category, graduation rates ranged from a high of 100% (Arkansas Baptist College) to a low of 8% (Southern University at New Orleans). Large gaps in graduation rates exist within each level of college competitiveness (Most Competitive, Highly Competitive, etc.); as well as within institutions who serve predominantly African American and Hispanic students (Hess et al., 2009).
- **Profits fuel bad behavior – paid by taxpayers**. The following was highlighted in reports published by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (Harkin, 2010). For-Profit Colleges aggressively advertise to low-income students and admit students who are not academically prepared to succeed. Unfortunately, most students leave these institutions in debt and without a diploma. As much as 90% of revenue at these colleges/businesses comes from federal grants and loans paid for by tax dollars.

These and other factors are indicators that the "system" of education is in the midst of major shifts. As more attention is focused on these factors, it seems likely that programs, policy, funding and practices will also be impacted. In the meantime, students are left to navigate a complex and shifting landscape.

Broad and Complicated Web

Although the topic of education is broad and deep, the focus of my dissertation is quite narrow. As a research project, I've chosen:

- <u>One process</u>: Persistence Coaching, and
- <u>One population</u>: low-income students enrolled in college

This choice sits at the intersection of my lived experience as a low-income first generation college graduate and my lived experience as a practicing executive coach. Both experiences are built on dialogic and relational processes.

I left college because I did not feel like I belonged there. I returned to college because people in my life supported me and encouraged me to do so. On my second attempt at college, I had a repertoire of relational resources available to sustain me.

For more than a decade I've worked in coaching relationships with adult professionals who want to co-create knowledge and expand identities. My hope and belief is that the processes that serve to support working adults will also help young adults succeed in college.

In a broader sense, this project is also a cultural study of education as a social system. I want to identify the historical and social practices that keep poor children from achieving educational parity with their wealthier peers. Locating these processes as global and persistent structures of power, changes the conversation for me. I better understand how precarious access to education can be for children and young adults, regardless of their location in the world. The potential disruptors include poverty; gender, race and religious expectations; war; and the politics that surround government funding. A world divided between the educated and the under-educated seems to me a world at risk.

How can Coaching be applied to Persistence?

Social Connectedness

Coaching's success in other settings makes it worthy of consideration in service of college persistence for low-income students. As a form of relational learning, Persistence Coaching is designed to build the confidence and resilience skills of Students through appreciative inquiry and other strengths-based practices.

Vincent Tinto's Model of Student Departure cites social connectedness as one factor in student departure (Tinto, 1987). Persistence Coaching is designed to offer social connectedness on multiple levels:

1. Student and Coach
2. Student and Learning Partners (selected by the Student)
3. Student and Peer Coaches (Students assigned to the same Learning Circle)

Optimism and Resilience

Research shows that college students who develop a high level of optimism are more resilient and are able to bounce-back quickly after disappointments and setbacks (Seligman, 1998; Reivich and Shatte, 2002). Persistence Coaching will teach students a more useful and success-building explanatory style, which can be practiced, to build levels of optimism that lead to resilience (Seligman, 1998; Reivich and Shatte, 2002).

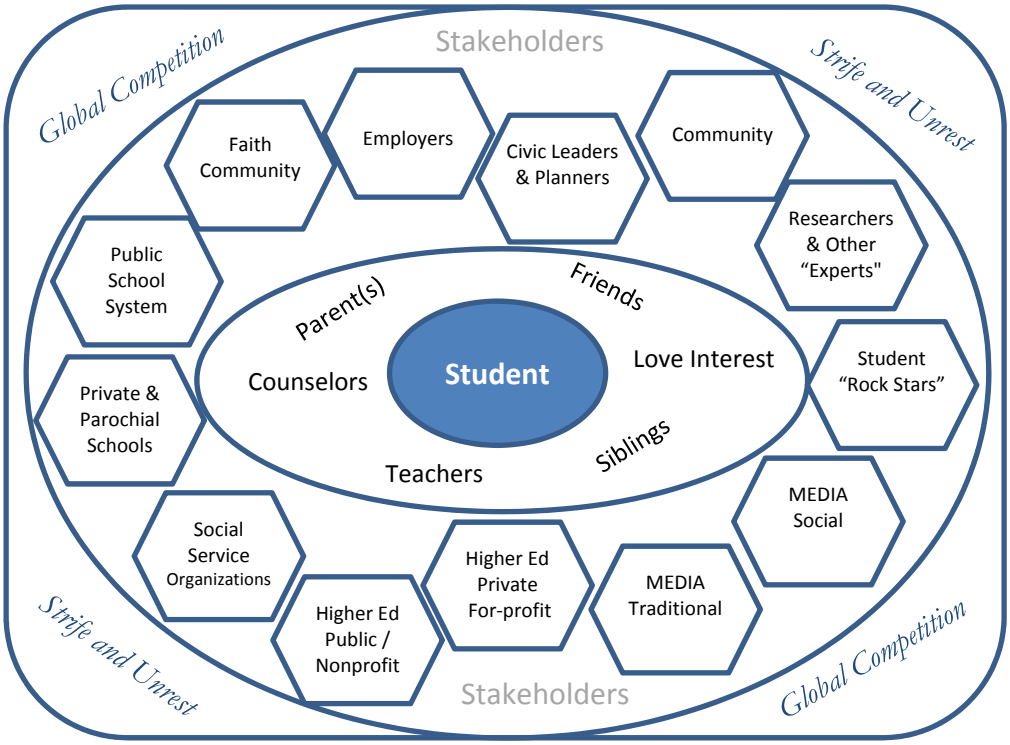
Whole and Capable

Persistence Coaching starts from the premise that students are whole, capable and full of potential. The fact that a student has enrolled in college (or aspires to college) indicates that he or she already has a depth of resources available to support them in success. Persistence Coaching works to identify those resources, make them visible and co-create ways to use them effectively in college. Further, it draws from the work in positivity, optimism and resilience to create additional resources.

Who Can Coach for Persistence?

A Student's social world is a complex mix of family, friends, teachers, and counselors. Any one of these individual's is well placed to coach for college persistence.

Student's Social World



Other stakeholders, though further removed, also have an interest in seeing the number of college graduates in their community increase. These include religious and civic organizations, local government and employers. These stakeholders can get involved in Persistence Coaching in a number of ways. They can provide funding for coach training; solicit their employees to volunteer as coaches, or provide space for training and meetings. Persistence Coaching, as I see it lived out in the world, can be used as a stand-alone practice or be incorporated into other programs, systems and relationships that support first-generation and low-income college students.

In June of 2012, I conducted my first train-the-trainer session for 12 nonprofit leaders involved in work with low-income youth in the St. Louis Community. The focus of the training was one of the strengths-based tools

used in Persistence Coaching called the VIA Inventory of Strengths.[10] In July, I will work with three of these nonprofit leaders to introduce the VIA tool and the concept of character strengths to 40 rising college freshmen, all of whom are low-income first-generation college students. By fall 2012, I hope to have a group of students as part of a pilot study to test and refine the Persistence Coaching elements.

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[1] Writing from first-person in this dissertation is intentional, but it challenges me. I've spent decades in the social practice we call education; and in this practice use of first-person narrative in formal or scholarly writing is frowned upon. Early drafts of this dissertation used first person in the Prologue but switched to third person in the introduction and following chapters. This switch was natural and unconscious for me. The use of third-person does, however, set up the writer (me) as an impartial and objective researcher, a stance that is antithetical to social constructionism. My decision was to embrace the "discomfort" and position myself as I am: a biased, entwined, embedded actor in the social world of which I write.

[2] Georgetown University, Center on Education and the Workforce, 2010 p. 14. http://www9.georgetown.edu/grad/gppi/hpi/cew/pdfs/FullReport.pdf

[3] OECD Education at a Glance 2011, Table A1.3a, Population with tertiary education in 2009.

[4] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2011, Enrollment component.

[5] Pell Institute 2003/04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study.

[6] Defined as Pell Grant eligible.

[7] All poverty statistics come from the 2011 KIDS COUNT Data Book. http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/acrossstates

[8] From a Washington University presentation based on the work of William F. Tate.

[9] There are a number of Federal Laws that impact equal access to education. Some of these are Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 that prohibited discrimination based on race, sex, and disability.

[10] VIA and the VIA logo are registered trademarks of the VIA Institute on Character.

RESEARCH PARADIGM

RESEARCH PARADIGM

"All qualitative researchers are philosophers in that universal sense in which all human beings….are guided by highly abstract principles."

Gregory Bateson, as discussed in Denzin & Lincoln (2005)

A Reflection

I came to social constructionist ideas rather late in my formal learning. In the mid-1990's I enrolled in a graduate program at Saint Louis University and a 10-month leadership development program sponsored by my employer. By coincidence, I was simultaneously introduced to the practice of appreciative inquiry (AI) and readings drawn from post-modern theory. My previous academic experience had not prepared me for either of these new learning practices. As a business major, I did not take a single course in philosophy or sociology. I completed three courses in statistics and learned the use of statistical analysis in determining "good" research. These courses did not equip, or encourage, me to ask whether the research was "socially meaningful or socially responsible" (Greenwood and Levin, 2005).

I recall the readings at Saint Louis University being difficult and dense. I would often have a dictionary at hand to look up words unfamiliar to me. As I had completed a master's degree and several professional certifications by this time, I was surprised at the depth of my "not knowing." I once complained to my professor that academic writers seemed to "intentionally create and use language to keep others out." It was the first time that I contemplated language as a structure of power and division. As a counter-balance, my leadership development program included multiple experiences based on appreciative inquiry. I found these to be fresh, alive, energizing and unlike anything I'd ever done.

Two young children, heavy work travel and a feeling that I was not well matched to the Public Policy Program caused me to leave the PhD program after three semesters of study. While I enjoyed the stimulation of all the courses, I particularly valued the philosophy and qualitative research courses I had taken.

I kept my course books "just in case" but it was the theory and practice of appreciative inquiry that stuck with me. I continued to read about AI, embedded AI approaches in my work practices, and enrolled in additional seminars. Almost a decade after leaving the PhD program at Saint Louis University, I found the Taos Institute and social construction theory through a link at the AI Commons,[1] a website self-described as a *world-wide portal to share academic resources and practical tools*. I attended my first Taos Institute workshop, conducted by Sheila McNamee and Harlene Anderson, in the fall of 2006. I applied to the Taos-Tilburg PhD program the week after I returned.

Unlike my earlier experience in the Public Policy Program, the Taos-Tilburg program's focus on the practitioner-scholar's lived experience and foundation of social construction theory felt absolutely right for me. While I continued (and still continue) to find some of the academic writings of social construction theory to be challenging, the ideas as brought to life by the Taos Institute faculty resonated and blossomed within me. I came to the program with a research question in mind and had substantial experience with qualitative research projects in my work. I expected the research process to unfold in a challenging, but orderly, way. This was not to be.

Like many doctoral students, my research has shifted and been shaped by my experience of social construction readings, participation in Taos workshops, and dialogue with my advisor and other Taos scholars. But that is not why I feel compelled to write this reflection. Instead, I want to examine, and share with you, some of the profound questions I continue to struggle with as I approach the end of this segment of my learning journey.

- What counts as research?
- How do we measure the truth? Who gets to decide?
- Where do I place myself in relation to my subject?
- If I acknowledge that I am, and can only be, biased and subjective, how can I contribute something of social value?
- How do I describe my research methodology? What if others reject it?

In a traditional positivist education, answers to these questions would have been codified, prescribed and communicated within coursework. Adherence to expectations would have been monitored by faculty and evaluation communicated vis-à-vis grades on papers and exams. However, when working within a social construction frame these are questions upon which each scholar and practitioner must deliberate. Choices must be made. Because the field of research practices is wide, it is easy for the inquirer to get distracted by the dazzling array of theoretical paradigms, strategies and approaches. At least that is what happened to me.

I have had a sense of these questions throughout my research, yet as I complete my manuscript I still find myself questioning whether I have produced "real research." I've pondered this deeply and have come to realize that there are two dominant discourses battling within me. My formative education, which I define as kindergarten through my master's degree, dictates that academic writing must meet certain standards. Gergen describes these standards as "actions congenial with a moral order" (Gergen, 1999). The moral order for good academic writing as I learned it is: written in third person, fact-based and objective, ordered logically, repeatable and generalizable, seeks a single truth, and "thorough" as determined by the evaluator. Crabtree and Miller characterize this step-by-step methodical approach as *Jacob's Ladder of Materialistic Inquiry* (Crabtree and Miller, 1992):

1. Define Research Problem
2. Literature Review
3. Hypothesis Formulation
4. Research Design
5. Instrumentation and Sampling
6. Data Collection
7. Data Analysis
8. Conclusions
9. Revise Hypothesis

Notably, this positivist approach to research is void of "humanness" as lived through story, song, humor, anecdote, opinion or personal voice. The range of acceptability is narrow.

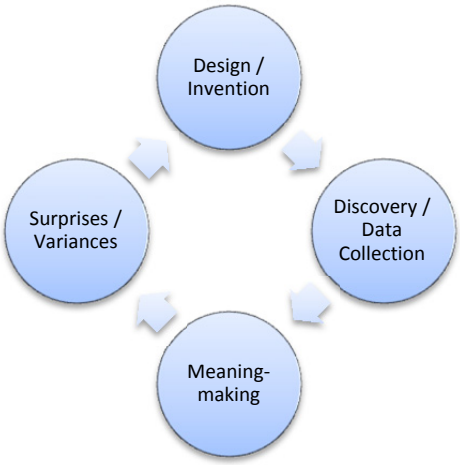
BRICOLEUR'S JOURNEY

"The product of the interpretive bricoleur's labor is a complex, quiltlike bricolage…a sequence of representations connecting the parts to the whole."

Denzin and Lincoln (2005)

The "other conversation" that struggles within me, the one built on social constructionist ideas and practices, has come to understand knowledge as co-created within relationship. It does not seek an ultimate truth. It understands truth as contextual and embedded in language practices and social action (Gergen, 1999; Burr, 2003). Rather than linear, inquiry within this tradition is an iterative dance of research design, discovery, interpretation, reflection and re-design. Crabtree and Miller refer to this research paradigm as *Shiva's*[2] *Circle of Constructivist*[3] *Inquiry*. Congenial to this research paradigm is the methodology of bricolage,[4] "a *poetic making-do… wherein choices about approach and interpretive practices are not necessarily made in advance"* (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). My approach to inquiry for this project borrows heavily from these authors.

Shiva's Circle
A Bricoleur's Inquiry
(Adapted from Crabtree and Miller / Denzin and Lincoln)



Crabtree and Miller (1992) further outline that:

- The Inquirer must be faithful to the performance and the actors.
- The Inquirer must be both apart from, and a part of, the dance.
- No ultimate truth exists.
- Context-bound constructions are all part of a larger universe of stories, all equally valid and important.

I began my research with a clear intention to engage social construction and enter Shiva's Circle. I did not, however, begin the journey as a bricoleur. Rather, my experience within the research process and my reflection of it led me to understand how seemingly disparate pieces are woven into a coherent whole.

For instance, interviews I conducted in 2007 with coaches and coaching clients do not show up directly in this manuscript. They do, however, inform the way in which I understand coaching as a dialogic and relational process.

My trip to Dublin in the summer of 2008 to attend the Global Convention on Coaching expanded my view of coaching beyond executives, performance and the workplace. It was the inflection point that moved me towards coaching as an agent of social change.

My work with St. Louis Graduates and our community engagement initiatives in 2009 and 2010 allowed me to understand the barriers that prevent low-income first-generation college students from graduating. Being close to the college access research allowed me to see what I believe to be a missing piece – relational processes designed to support college persistence.

Various turns around Shiva's Circle required differing strategies and methods of data collection: interviews, participant observation, review of

artifacts and documents. Each was valuable in its own way. Regardless of the method, I never lost sight of the fact that I was not a neutral observer. As a first-generation college graduate, in many ways I was "the other."

I offer this reflection to you as a way to situate me within the research process. When I have discovered myself caught up in the old paradigm (a reluctance to write in first person, for example) I've tried to step back, reflect on the kind of conversation I hope to create, then choose a deliberate action based on this social practice. When I find myself being pulled toward "better data" (more interviews, additional case studies, a pilot study), I've stopped to consider: To which audience am I speaking? And to what end? Lastly, I've learned to embrace reflective practice as a form of legitimate inquiry.

Even with this effort, it is possible that you will encounter sections of text that seem inconsistent or perplexing to you. I hope, however, this is minimal and does not distract from your understanding or our conversation.

Theoretical Paradigm and Approach

As I have noted previously, the theoretical foundation from which I work is social constructionism. Appreciative inquiry, one elaboration of social construction theory, forms the framework for Persistence Coaching and shapes the way in which coaching is practiced. There are chapters devoted to each of these topics

At its heart, I consider my project to be action-research blended with a cultural study. While either of these research approaches might have been used singularly, I believe that the potential for meaningful social action is enhanced by blending the two approaches. Paula Saukko outlines the distinguishing features of cultural studies as having:

- A focus on lived realities
- A critical analysis of the discourses that mediate our experiences and realities

- An investigation of historical, social and political structures of power

By framing the cultural dimension of education within its social and historical processes, I've offered you a type of contextual validity – a way to measure the worth of this project (Saukko, 2005). ***Is using coaching to increase the college graduation rates for low-income students worth the effort?***

For me, at least in this case, knowledge without action would have been untenable. This project was action-research long before I wrote the first word of this manuscript. My research:

- is aimed at solving a real-world problem *(too few low-income students graduate from college*)
- seeks to transform inquiry into practice (*the Persistence Coaching process is a practical tool, which can be used by any stakeholder in a Student's life*)
- seeks to co-create knowledge (*my work with St. Louis Graduates and nonprofit agencies who work with low-income students informed, and will continue to inform, my work*)

Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart (2005) describe participatory action research as a spiral of self-reflective cycles, which include:

- *Planning* a change
- *Acting* and *observing* the process and consequences of the change
- *Reflecting* on these processes
- *Replanning*
- *Acting* and *observing again*
- *Reflecting again*, and so on…

If you consider my proposal for persistence coaching in this project as *planning,* then you can see that my work has only just begun.

[1] http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/

[2] Shiva is the Hindu Lord of Dance and Transformation (Crabtree and Miller, 1992).

[3] I have found that some writers use the terms "constructionist" and "constructivist" interchangeably. For instance, Guba and Lincoln (2005) state that they consider themselves "social constructivists/constructionists." Most scholars working within these disciplines would draw distinct differences.

[4] Bricolage and bricoleur are French terms which do not have exact English translations. The Handbook of Qualitative Research (pages 4 – 6) contains multiple examples of researchers who use these terms. Metaphorical examples of bricolage are quilts; montages; and, art made with found objects. Common characteristics include adaptability, using what is at hand, invention based on need, and assemblage.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

Social constructionism is not a single, unified theory. Rather it describes a broad set of ideas, characteristics and conversations. Some of these conversations overlap and some are unique among social construction scholars (Gergen and Gergen, 2003; Burr, 2003). Social construction has a strong focus on relationship, language, meaning-making and narrative, which makes it particularly hospitable and relevant to the practice of coaching. It has roots in ethics, philosophy, psychology, sociology and education, yet it cannot be contained or confined by any one of them.

A Postmodern Concept

Social constructionism is considered a post-modern philosophy. Post-modernism rejects that there are grand theories (meta-narratives) that can adequately explain or describe our world. Further, it holds that there is no "ultimate truth"; and no such thing as value neutrality. Instead, there co-exists multiple valid ways of life (Anderson, 1997; Burr, 2003; Gergen, 1999).

Vivien Burr cites the last 25 years as a period of "alternative approaches to the study of human beings as social animals" (Burr, 2003). She points to two publications, in particular, as sparking much of the conversation surrounding social constructionism:

- The 1966 publication of "The Social Construction of Reality" written by sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann. In it, they argue that people, through every day social processes, create and sustain all social phenomenon.

- Ken Gergen's 1973 paper, "Social Psychology as History." Burr notes it as the emerging point of social constructionism in psychology, a field upon which much of coaching is based. Gergen argues that all knowledge, including psychological knowledge, is historically-fixed and culturally-anchored. And so, inquiry must move beyond the individual to the social, political and economic environments that surround them.

Relational Practices

Social constructionism places relationship, and relational practices, at the epicenter of what it means to be human. It challenges the idea of society as simply a collection of individual bounded entities "acting on" one another. Philosopher and theologian, Martin Buber, offers us a particular way of being in relationship. Buber writes that we can relate to another person as a personal presence (I-Thou) or we can relate to them as subject-object (I-It). Genuine dialogue can only take place from I-Thou and this stance creates a unique place, which Buber calls "the between." "The between" plays a central role in social constructionist thinking, as it is the space where relationship, meaning-making and coordinated change exist (Buber, 1970).

A Family of Ideas

While social constructionism is not a single, unified theory, it does have certain overlapping characteristics much like a family feature that allow us to recognize a distant relative at a family reunion. The following themes are shared across the writing of many social construction scholars:

1. Knowledge is communally created
2. Personhood (self and identity) is created within relationship
3. Language creates our world
4. Meaning is local and open to change
5. Stories shape the view of history and enable future possibilities
6. There is value in questioning the things taken for granted

I would like to elaborate on each one of these themes to highlight the ways in which they are experienced in practice.

Knowledge is Communally Created

"I am large…I contain multitudes."

Walt Whitman, Song of Myself (51)

Knowledge is a social creation. It is not "out there" in nature to be discovered through observation as a logical empiricist would have us believe. Nor is it "in here" to be discovered within the individual mind as psychology would have us believe. The "nature of things" is constructed by people through the social and relational practices in which they engage (Gergen, 1999; Hosking and McNamee, 2006; Cooperrider et al., 2005).

We are born into a social world that already exists. Our particular world comes with boundaries - embedded language forms, social practices, customs, myths, fables, conceptual frameworks and categories. These particulars are passed on through the ordinary conversations we have with the people in our lives and are quickly habitualized into systems of thought, belief and patterns of action. People both create knowledge and are shaped by the knowledge created. Researcher, Richard Nisbett, describes this as a self-reinforcing, homeostatic system: social practices encourage particular world views; those world views dictate appropriate thought processes; and the thought processes both justify the world views and support the social practices (Nisbett, 2004).

Meaning Making

To say that people construct knowledge is not to say that things and events are "not real" or that there is no physical world. Children fall down. Friends die. People get fired from jobs they like. But the meaning, my particular belief about these things, is constructed within my social groupings and expressed in language.

As a simplistic example, something we name as "table" has potentially different meanings based on whether we experience it from the position of chemist, biologist, interior designer, or hungry diner. The meaning lies within particular forms or patterns of human interaction. Ludwig Wittgenstein called these forms "language games" as they have rules,

boundaries and norms that govern them and serve to distinguish one from another. For instance, consider chess as compared to checkers (Biletzki and Matar, 2011). Social constructionists might refer to these as "practices" to avoid the meaning made in our culture of "game" as a frivolous childhood activity.

Practices serve both to create knowledge that binds social groupings and to keep others out of it. It takes years for physicians to learn the knowledge called medicine. Specialized language and rituals serve to keep most people outside of the realm of doctor. But physicians communicate easily with their patients and other non-physicians. Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin theorized that because we are exposed to the knowledge produced by many different social groupings we are all "multi-voiced."

Belief vs. Truth

Normative practices operate to define a social group and also shape what knowledge they privilege as "truth." These truths often create seemingly irresolvable dichotomies: kind vs. cruel; bold vs. timid; leader vs. follower; etc. Buber notes that people take comfort in yes-no and right-wrong dichotomies. It makes life simple and understandable. Managing multiple realities of "truth" when the stakes are high, for instance in conversations around social justice or religious beliefs, can be quite difficult. Social constructionism accepts that there are multiple, equally valid, truths operating simultaneously (Buber, 1970).

Knowledge as Power

Philosopher Michel Foucault takes a darker view of the normative practices that generate knowledge. Foucault links the construction of "truth" to power and control. To be a member of a group is to adhere to, and not challenge, the "dominant discourse." The group's vision of knowledge is perpetuated through proselytizing, education and enforcement (Foucault as discussed in Gergen, 2003).

The social constructionist's response to Foucault's view of normative knowledge is often called "the questioning stance." Social constructionists believe that there is value in questioning the things taken-for-granted

(Burr, 2003). This has practical implications for the construction of relationships.

- How do we "name" the other person in our relationships - client or partner; friend or foe; neighbor or stranger?
- Where and how often do we meet; and, who decides?
- What expertise is valued and what is ignored?

Practices Rather than Traits Construct Outcomes

Relationships support individuals in pursuit of activities and goals tied to desired outcomes important within their social world. These outcomes are often knowledge constructs such as confidence, empathy, parenthood, friendship or leadership. Social construction does not look for explanations of outcomes as connected to some attribute "inside" the person (personality, attitude, motivation, intelligence, etc.). And it looks beyond the assigned labels given by other people. Rather, social constructionism looks at the practices engaged in by people that serve to generate understanding of outcomes, such as confidence or friendship. This relocates meaning-making (knowledge) and subsequent action away from the individual and places it instead within the processes that create it.

> *"...a shift in characteristic social practices could therefore be expected to produce a shift in typical patterns of perception and thought."*
>
> Nisbett, 2003

In a constructionist conversation, this means that the focus is less on the "what" (*I want to be a good parent*) and more on the processes that create the "what" (*How do you define being a good parent? How is this defined in your family and community? Could it be defined differently in other families or other parts of your community, for instance by teachers or school administrators? Who will evaluate and decide if you are a good parent? How will it be measured? How have others gone about becoming viewed as good parents? What or who might resist you being a good*

parent?). These conversations focus less on the "truth" (a single, definable, knowable version of a good parent) and more on the ways in which a particular "version" of it are created and sustained.

Personhood is Created Within Relationship

"A person is a person through other people."

Ubuntu Philosophy

Social constructionism rejects the essentialist belief that a set of biologically-determined characteristics make you the person you are. Rather, "self" is constructed from within the cultural conversations that surround you. Personal identity is woven from a broad array of factors: age, gender, class, race, education, occupation, income, sexual-orientation, physical agility, marital and parenting status, etc. There are as many potential identities as are created by, and embedded in, our conversations. But these are socially-bestowed identities and not the "essence" of the person (Burr, 2003; Anderson, 1997).

At any given time, within the society and historical period in which we live, there are multiple identity-constructing conversations at work. Some serve to create and sustain particular identities; while others work to limit the identities that are deemed available or acceptable. In this way both continuity and coherence are maintained. Identities become a matter of *forming* and *performing* (Gergen as discussed in Anderson, 1997; Burr, 2003).

For a 50 year old woman living in the mid-western United States in the early 21st century the identities of wife, mother, gardener, and income-earner are culturally available. None of these identities pose conflicts with the dominant, prevailing conversations surrounding femininity or age. However, her decision to start a construction company or apply to medical school would likely create conflict or confusion if the culturally available identities do not include women in the construction industry or middle-aged medical students.

Cultural Norms

The available identities differ from culture to culture and shift within a culture over time. Consider the following children's riddle:

> *A man and his son were in a car accident. The man died on the way to the hospital, but the boy was rushed into surgery. The surgeon said "I can't operate, for that's my son!" How is this possible?*

The answer is that the surgeon is the boy's mother. In the United States twenty-five years ago this riddle stumped almost everyone. Female physicians, particularly surgeons, were an anomaly. The riddle likely continues to confuse some people in some social groups even though contemporary U.S. medical schools admit male and female students at about the same rate.

Identity-constructing conversations can be strict and narrow or accept wide variation. In some cultures it is easier to accept women as physicians (a historically male identity) than it is to accept males as nurses (a historically female identity).

There are risks and repercussions for individuals who choose identities that are outside the boundaries of what is culturally available to them. They may be labeled abnormal, incompetent or wrong-headed. They may lose privilege, power or access to the "in group" and in the most extreme cases, individuals may be removed (demoted, jailed or deported) or banished (become invisible).

Identities Shift and Change

The prevailing cultural conversations shape a set of expectations regarding "how" individuals will transition from one identity to another. The conversation that surrounds age, for instance, includes an array of identities ranging from young innocent to youthful virility to decrepit old-age. The individual is expected to "act into" the appropriate identity based on the prevailing conversation surrounding the number that is defined as age. There are, of course, alternate discourses. Rather than constructing old age as memory decline, weakness and disease; it can be constructed as an identity containing wisdom, respect and serenity.

The prevailing conversations are powerful and many are viewed as immutable. We take as "truth" the inevitable decline of memory as we age. Yet the work of Ellen Langer and Becca Levy shows that the age-memory link is socially constructed and does not exist in the two cultures they studied in mainland China and the American Deaf community who do not expect it to happen (Langer, 1997).

Some identities, such as those that surround age shift slowly. In other cases, the shift is sudden and unexpected. A public example of this is Christopher Reeve, an American actor perhaps best known for his role as Superman. In an instant, Reeve's identities changed from tall, handsome actor and competitive athlete to a quadriplegic confined to a wheelchair and dependent on breathing apparatus. The new identities available to Reeve: spokesperson for those with spinal cord injuries; founder of philanthropic and research institutions; director and producer; were shaped by the evolving conversations made available to him within his social world.

People experience themselves through identities that are concrete and real to them. They can become "trapped" in identities assigned to them by social communities. This entrapment can lead to subtle but automatic actions (habits) that serve to reinforce these identities. For example, African American students taking college entrance exams who are asked to check a box identifying their race score lower than groups who are not asked about race (Steele and Aronson, 1995).

Renegotiation of identity may be necessary for individuals who feel constrained by, or are in conflict with, some aspect of their identity. Rather than looking to personal characteristics for answers, social constructionism examines the social processes that create and sustain identity; and explores the "soft edges" surrounding a particular identity as a way to create options, possibility and alternatives. The process of identity renegotiation is never about one person – rather it involves a complex and inter-dependent network of social relationships and social processes.

Language Creates the World

"The limits of my language are the limits of my world"

Ludwig Wittgenstein in Biletzki and Matar, 2011

Whether conscious or not, people have an underlying belief about language and communication that governs their actions in various situations. Most likely it is the "transmission" model of communication that includes a sender, a receiver and a message. The transmission model holds that if the sender is skilled and precise in language usage then the message is sent without distortion and represents a "picture" of what the sender intended (Pearce, 2007). If misunderstanding, unfortunate actions or unintended results follow the transmission, one of three things is at fault:

- **Sender** (the Sender was not clear, didn't adapt his style sufficiently or perhaps his words and body language were incongruent)
- **Transmission technology** (the message was disrupted or distorted by using the wrong medium – the sender emailed when she should have called)
- **Receiver** (the Receiver was not paying attention, has insufficient background, or is incompetent)

It is easy to see how this model can quickly lead to conflict, impasse or avoidance.

Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein is credited with replacing the picture metaphor of communication with a use-governed account. Wittgenstein proposes that a word does not correspond to the thing itself; instead, the meaning is dependent on its use within language (Heaton and Groves, 2005). Words then are by-products of social relationships and do not exist independent of the people who use them (McNamee, 1999; Anderson, 1997). In practical terms, to say that John Brown died is to say that the holder of the name has died. The meaning of John Brown, at least to his family and friends, lives on.

Social construction centers language as a core process. It is the vehicle through which we communicate with others and ourselves (for those who doubt the use of language in self-talk, ponder whether you "hear" these words as you are reading them). Of particular interest is how people use language in everyday interactions, how they build accounts of events and how they manage the performative functions of language (Burr, 2003).

It is no surprise then, that social constructionism imbues language with particular properties. It sees language as:

- **Central to the Human Experience**: Language is what distinguishes us from other species. While other animals communicate through scent, sound and body posture, they are incapable of using language in the way of humans.
- **Performative:** Language brings about effects in the world – it "does" things of consequence: *You are fired. I pronounce you man and wife. The jury finds you guilty.*
- **All embodied acts:** Words, deeds, gestures, artifacts, rituals, metaphors, etc.
- **Dependent on embedded use:** The meaning of words is dependent upon their placement - both what comes before and after. "Yellow" makes no sense as a response to "What's for dinner?"
- **Having an after-life**: Our words live on in the memories of those who are affected by them and are re-membered in other situations.

Speech Acts

The work of communication scholar W. Barnett Pearce (2007) is congenial to the social constructionist view of language and communication. Pearce suggests that we look at the communication processes that create meaning by asking questions such as, *"What are we making together?" "How are we making it?" "How can we make it better?"*

Pearce sees communication as a two-sided process of making meaning and coordinating actions. The two processes come together in what people say and do.

Austin (1962) says that we "do things" with our words and actions; words and actions are performances that he calls speech acts. Drawing on Austin's work, Pearce uses the term “speech acts” (which can be verbal and nonverbal) and he includes in them many familiar language forms such as arguments, compliments, insults, promises, etc. (Pearce, 2007). Pearce makes the case that there are countless forms that speech acts can take. Some become obsolete from disuse with new ones being created. To “Facebook” someone (check on the status and activities of an individual using the social media website called Facebook) is a contemporary example of a speech act that may, or may not, be sustained over time.

Meaning, to the social constructionist, is not in the word/action nor in the person; meaning is in the act/response relation. Thus, to name an action an "insult" (i.e., to identify it as the speech act "insult") requires not only the performance of one person but the response of the other. My comment to you only becomes an insult at the moment you become defensive.

This approach to communication has implications for the social constructionist perspective. It relocates an unwanted outcome (such as conflict) away from the individual and focuses instead on the language process that creates it. Doing so allows us to examine the joint action (speech acts) that we call “conflict.” This shifts us to a place of inquiry that creates the possibility for different choices. *“If ‘conflict’ is something we do well, are there other speech acts, ‘curiosity’ for instance, that might lead us to a different outcome?” “How might changing the ratio of speech acts, conflict : curiosity, affect the outcome?” “What might happen if we rearrange the order of our speech acts by starting with ‘curiosity’ before we move to ‘conflict’?*

Pearce’s work offers us a number of useful approaches to understanding language practices and how they impact relationships. Taken together, these may allow us to “act wisely” in critical moments.

Stories Create Past and Possibilities

People do many things with language including the creation of narrative and storytelling. Socially constructed narratives organize and give meaning to events, experiences and relationships. These include stories about individuals that serve to shape personal identity. "My" story, then, is multi-voiced and represents a set of interlocking and overlapping narratives, but it is not "mine" alone:

Narrative accounts are embedded within social action. Events are rendered socially visible…used to establish expectations for future events…Narratives of the self are not fundamentally possessions of the individual, rather they are products of social interchange – possessions of the socius.

Gergen & Gergen, 1988

Psychologist Mary Aftel believes that the way an individual understands and describes his or her life is connected to the way it is lived. Further, it is "narrative pattern" that holds and sustains individual identities (Aftel, 1997).

Both Aftel and Gergen agree that narratives must follow a convention in order to be useful and understandable. Both point to the same example: "*The King dies and then the Queen dies,"* which contains plot points, but is not a story. *"The King dies and then the Queen dies of a broken heart"* contains the requisite elements to make it a story. (Aftel, 1997; Gergen, 1999) Gergen defines the necessary narrative elements as:

- a valued endpoint *(a goal)*
- events relevant to that endpoint *(good narrative excludes irrelevant events)*
- ordering events *(linear time is one convention often used)*
- causal linkages *(sense of explanation)*

Stories serve to organize experience (people, places, events) into a cohesive whole. These stories are often retrospective and selectively include some people, places and events while ignoring others. Narrative

accounts of the same "event" are often constructed differently depending on who is doing the telling. Stories are also malleable and changing. From a constructionist perspective, the possibility of reframing and re-storying offers powerful possibility. Again, the focus turns away from the individual person and toward the processes that create the narratives of the person.

Harlene Anderson, a psychologist and social construction scholar, cautions that those working with individuals to re-author narrative have a special responsibility for the way they position themselves in the "hearing and creating" process. For instance, as a coach how do I talk with and about my coaching client; what topics are selected for conversation and which are ignored; and how do I as a coach (teacher or parent) participate in the telling (Anderson, 1997).

Lastly, since social constructionism considers stories as collective rather than individual artifacts. Operating from this stance requires that other "tellers" be incorporated into the re-storying process as a way to create "endpoints" that may be more useful and productive.

Social Constructionism as an Ever-changing Set of Ideas

Social construction practitioners represent a broad continuum of beliefs and philosophies. To remain true to its own nature, social constructionist thought must continue to evolve and change, for as soon as practitioners define its tenets as "Truth," they objectify it, declare themselves experts, and ignore that specific culture and history are impermanent. What is known to be true today will be seen as antiquated or ignorant by others when viewed from a different vantage point.

Social Construction in Action

"To the extent that our constructions of the world are founded upon language.....then language underpins the forms of action that it is possible for us to take."

Vivien Burr

One of the characteristics of social constructionism is the belief that knowledge and action go hand-in-hand. Social construction is both a philosophy and way of being in the world. As such, it has been operationalized in a number of descendent practices such as discursive psychology, brief and queer therapies, and appreciative inquiry. While social construction values appreciative ways of relating as a resource for connecting, exploring and accepting diversity; it equally accepts other ways of relating (Hosking and McNamee 2006).

I selected appreciative inquiry as the framework for my action research project because I believe that its focus on the positive, life-giving, aspirational nature of knowing will benefit the Students who participate in Persistence Coaching.

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

I have been using appreciative inquiry, typically called "AI" by its practitioners, for more than 15 years. For me, it is both a philosophical stance and a set of practices. Appreciative inquiry is drawn from social construction theory. It does have, however, one notable distinction. AI focuses exclusively on positive and "life giving" aspects. Appreciative inquiry is embedded in all of my practices, including my work on this project. As a form of action research, it provides the methodology for my study and guides my future work with first-generation students. AI's positive approach to inquiry and action is threaded throughout the Persistence Coaching process and becomes the foundation for the strengths-based approaches used in coaching.

In this chapter I will provide you with a brief history of appreciative inquiry, its groundbreaking approach to research and relocation of the researcher from "independent witness" to active agent. I will provide specific examples of the ways in which AI theory can be translated to practical actions. Lastly, I will discuss how AI informs Persistence Coaching.

Action Research Revisited

At its inception, Appreciative Inquiry was envisioned by its developers, Suresh Srivastva and David Cooperrider, as a conceptual reconfiguration of action-research, which they criticized as a "failed instrument for advancing social knowledge of consequence" (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987). Srivastva and Cooperrider believed that action-research had veered far from Kurt Lewin's vision of it as a "bridge between science and practice" (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987). Lewin, a German-American social psychologist, coined the term action-research in 1944 and viewed it as a kind of virtuous cycle. Departing from the view of science as being reserved for the "ivory tower," Lewin said, "We should consider action, research, and training as a triangle that should be kept together (Lewin, 1948).

In 1980, Cooperrider was a doctoral student in Case Western Reserve University's Organizational Behavior program. Srivastva was his doctoral advisor. Cooperrider began with a conventional problem analysis

approach to organizational assessment. The underlying assumption to this approach to organizational changes assumes there is a "problem to be solved" (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987). This problem orientation has a long history in the management sciences and in action-research. This approach typically involves:

1. Identification of existing problems, deficiencies or weaknesses
2. Analysis to determine the root cause of these problems, deficiencies and weaknesses
3. Identification of possible solutions
4. Analysis of various solutions to determine the optimal course of action
5. Development of an action plan (with measures and evaluation)

Inside of Every System – Some Things Are Working

As Cooperrider went about his work he was struck by the "positive cooperation, innovation and egalitarian governance" he saw in The Cleveland Clinic, the organization being studied. With the approval of Srivastva and The Cleveland Clinic's Chairman of the Board, Cooperrider's research took a decidedly different turn.The new research was focused exclusively on an analysis of the factors that contributed to the highly effective functioning of the Cleveland Clinic *when it was at its best*. Everything else was ignored. The findings from the study were presented by Cooperrider and Srivastva to the Cleveland Clinic's Board of Governors, who made the decision to use the approach in other areas of the organization (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987).

The Cleveland Clinic became the first large-scale application of an inquiry approach focused exclusively on "life-giving factors" as the basis for organizational analysis. The term "appreciative inquiry" was noted as an emergent theme in the written report. Cooperrider's doctoral dissertation, *Appreciative Inquiry: Toward a Methodology for Understanding and Enhancing Organizational Innovation* was published in 1986 and is considered the seminal work in appreciative inquiry theory and application.

Problem-Oriented Language

Contemporary management consultants often speak in terms of "the presenting problem" and a strong business proposal will invariably include a root cause analysis of the problem. One popular approach to quality improvement in the business sector is Six Sigma.[1] Six Sigma™, adopted by more than two-thirds of Fortune 500 companies (DeFeo, 2005), is focused on reducing defects (errors and unusable product). The term is drawn from manufacturing where a 6σ process would yield 3.4 defects per million parts or items. I attended Six Sigma™ training as a corporate employee in 1999. I found the language and processes to be fraught with deficit language.

From Problem-Solving to Possibility-Seeking

At the heart of AI is the belief that by focusing on the positive (what is already working) you can influence change in a direction that is useful and beneficial. The direction of this change is selected through collaboration with those residing in the system, using a series of carefully crafted questions and using the findings from those questions as a source of inspiration and planning. Change, it is believed, begins with the first question asked.

AI and Social Constructionism

In their 1987 article, "Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life," Cooperrider and Srivastva noted that few Organizational Development academic programs valued theory or included theory-building as part of the curriculum design. In the same article, Cooperrider and Srivastva position the action vs. theory conflict as a false dichotomy, instead seeing them as part of an "integral unity." The article drew heavily from Ken Gergen's work in social constructionism and introduced a meta-theory of socio-rationalism as a counter-weight to the prevailing logical empiricism. They proposed that this new theory would be generative (rather than predictive) and would foster dialogue to create new alternatives for social action. They offered ten supporting points:

1. What exists at any given time (the social order and patterns of action) is a product of broad social agreement (which can be implicit or explicit).
2. These social patterns are not fixed by nature, change over time and are capable of infinite variation.
3. Social action is open to multiple interpretations depending upon a given point of view and historical perspective. No one of these interpretations is objectively superior to another.
4. Assumptions (historically embedded conventions and theories) determine what we accept as truth. All observations, whether by scientist or lay person, are filtered through belief systems and theories. There is no such thing as an unbiased observer.
5. Social action is built upon ideas, beliefs, meanings and theories. By changing the frame of assumptions (paradigm) people can try to transform prevailing conduct.
6. Dialogue, made possible by language, is the most powerful tool that people have to change their conventions (agreement on norms, values, policies, purposes, and ideology). Changes in language practices have the potential to change social practices.
7. Social theory can be viewed as highly refined language with specialized words and grammar. Trained specialists (social scientists) create the particular grammar and language used by its members (the scientific community). The language (and theory) of these specialists seep into the general culture, and in doing so, affect patterns of social action.
8. All theory is normative. Reaction to theory may range widely from acceptance to defiance to indifference. This reaction will be linked to what is valued and accepted by the observer. Theory, then, has the potential to influence the social order.
9. Because theory is normative (not descriptive), social theory is morally relevant. It has real implications to ordinary people as they relate to one another. There is no such thing as a detached, objective, neutral way of determining the value of a particular truth claim.
10. Social theory (knowledge) is communally created. It is not "out there" in nature to be discovered through detached, value-free,

observational methods (logical empiricism); nor is "inside" the subjective minds of individuals (solipsism or the belief that nothing exists outside the mind). Social knowledge is collective and is created, maintained, and put to use by a human group.

From Witness to Active Agent

Especially important to me in the way I think and act in my research project is how I locate myself, as researcher, in the process. In their work, Cooperrider and Srivastva shifted the role of the social scientist away from that of an impartial bystander, or expert witness. Rather, they identify the researcher as an active agent. This makes the researcher an invested participant with the potential to become "a powerful source of change in the way people see and enact their worlds" (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987).

Theory Informing Practice

According to Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros (Cooperrider et al., 2005)[2] there are five principles that moved Appreciative Inquiry from theory into practice.

1. The Constructionist Principle
2. The Principle of Simultaneity
3. The Poetic Principle (Open Book Principle)
4. The Anticipatory Principle
5. The Positive Principle

Constructionist Principle

Drawing from social constructionism this principle places relationships, rather than the individual, as the central creator of knowledge. Language practices play a pivotal role in the creation of knowledge, thus, the way of knowing is "fateful." Systems and organizations are living, changing, human constructions that include people who hold a variety of beliefs and assumptions.

Simultaneity Principle

This principle recognizes that inquiry and change are not separate events. Rather they can, and should, be simultaneous. Inquiry is intervention. Change becomes the things about which people think and talk. The seeds of change are resident in the first question asked because they focus attention and energy in a particular way.

Poetic Principle

This principle is also referred to as the "Open Book" principle. It is a metaphor for the endless interpretations, and re-interpretations, possible for the stories generated by individuals, families, communities and organizations. Like poetry, meaning-making is often nuanced and multi-layered. Interpretation is shaped through exploration. Stories of pasts, presents and futures are constantly being co-authored and revised through conversation. Within any story there are myriad factors that could serve as a source of inquiry. One can choose to study moments of success, inspiration and strength. Or one can choose to study moments of trauma, defeat and setback.

Anticipatory Principle

This principle recognizes that the future – imagining it, discussing it, and planning it – is a resource for change. Our action in the present is guided by our vision for the future. Similarly, a collective vision for the future guides system-wide action in the present. Human systems are mobilized by visions of the future.

Positive Principle

Cooperrider acknowledged that the Positive Principle was added at a later date based on field experience. It recognizes that change requires large amounts of effort. Momentum for change is built and supported by positive emotions and attitudes (such as hope, excitement and joy) as well as social bonding (the act of creating with another). As human constructions, organizations are responsive to positive thought and

positive knowledge. Positivity expands our view of the possible and fuels change.

Inquiry: Positive and Appreciative

At its best, appreciative inquiry believes that inquiry should:

- Be appreciative of what already exists. In every system there are things that work well. Identifying, describing and explaining these strengths serve to highlight what is resident in the system when it is at its best. These are the practices, customs and attributes that give the organization life and vibrancy.

- Reveal important information about what is possible for the future. This knowledge can be used to generate this future – and the outcomes can be observed and validated.

- Energize and stimulate the aspirations and energy of those resident in the system. These people have a vested interest in shaping the future.

- Be collaborative. This means involving a wide range of stakeholders.

- Acknowledge the relationship between the process of inquiry and the topic of inquiry. We create change simply by asking questions about the topic. Our presence and the questions we choose to ask are not, and cannot be, neutral or invisible factors.

The Positive Core

At its most basic, appreciative inquiry is a process designed to identify "the positive core" – those things that are essential, energizing and life-giving aspects of the culture. Often these are so deeply ingrained in the fabric of what we say and do each day that they are unspoken and not readily identifiable. We do things a certain way because "that's how we do it." The AI process can highlight these shared assumptions and illuminate

possibilities to do things differently. This allows individuals to choose practices more aligned with the shared values of the organization.

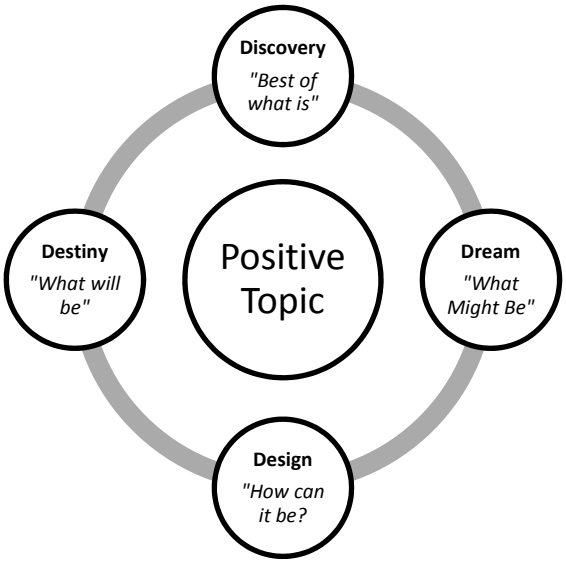
The Four-D Cycle – Positive by Design

"We can't ignore problems. We just need to approach them from the other side."

Thomas H. White (President, GTE Telephone Operations)

According to Ron Fry, management professor and AI theorist, appreciative inquiry is not a toolkit or fixed methodology but it does have a set of principles and processes that guide it. The 4-D cycle is of one of those processes. The 4-D cycle, shown in Figure A-1, begins with the selection of the topic to be studied.

Figure A-1
Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle



In the case of AI, the topic is always an affirmative, or positive, one. This means that we identify what we want or desire (our aspiration), not what we don't want (a problem or deficit). Topics may be framed either as a

statement or as a question. For example, if we want to increase the number of low-income urban students who graduate from college, we could define our inquiry topic in multiple ways.

The topic could be: (**What are) the barriers that keep poor students from graduating college**? Our inquiry would, no doubt, reveal a range of problems such as lack of financial resources, parents without college experience, substandard academic preparation and poor counseling. The problems would be real, not imagined. As we talked to students, parents, and other key stakeholders, it would be easy for us to get "stuck" in the midst of problems that seem intractable and overwhelming. We would discover many things that have derailed, confused and demoralized students who have not graduated from college. It would not, however, help us understand how to do more of the things that have worked to support students who have succeeded in graduating from college.

A different topic might be: (**What are) the factors that contribute to the success of low-income college graduates?** This inquiry takes us to a different place, one where we will find stories of empowerment, strategies for overcoming problems, examples of relationships that provided support and guidance and ideas that inspire new ways of thinking.

The difference in topic selection and how we state it is more than semantics. Research shows that positive images and affirming internal dialogue lead to positive action (Fredrickson and Branigan, 2005; Fredrickson, 2009; Seligman, 1998; Reivich and Shatte, 2002). Cooperrider cites several pieces of research that support the Positive Principle, but perhaps the simplest is what is commonly called the self-fulfilling prophecy. If I believe something will happen, I act in ways that make this outcome more likely.

It is important to note that the selection of a positive topic is not about frequency of occurrence. In the above example we know from statistical data that the ratio of students who do not succeed (i.e. are overcome by barriers and do not graduate from college) is much higher than students who succeed (graduate college). The underlying assumption in AI is that if

we focus exclusively on our aspiration (successful college graduates) we will discover the processes, forces and factors that create and support it. Understanding these "life giving forces" will allow us to create the optimal conditions to repeat them and build the infrastructure and social processes to sustain them. The topic selection is the anchor point that will guide the inquiry as we engage the AI 4-D Cycle (Discovery – Dream – Design – Destiny).

Inquiry as Intervention

"It all starts with inquiry. The key point is that the way we know is fateful. The questions we ask, the things that we choose to focus on, the topics we choose determine what we find. What we find becomes the data and the story out of which we dialogue about and envision the future. And so the seeds of change are implicit in the very first questions we ask. Inquiry is intervention."

David Cooperrider, 2005

Discovery – What Gives Life

The first "D" of the cycle is ***Discovery***. Again the choice of language is notable. Cooperrider could have defined this step as questioning, research or diagnosis; instead, he chose language that prepares us to explore, to venture off the beaten path, to be surprised and open to finding things that we don't expect. Like explorers and discovers of old, we start our journey with an idea of who will join us in the journey (key stakeholders) and a map of sorts. The AI map is an interview guide that contains questions designed to explore the topic selected. These questions will guide the journey of exploration.

Discovery can be informal and exist in conversation between two people. It can also be formal and include every person in a given system (employees, customers, suppliers, community representatives, etc.). There are likely as many ways to conduct ***Discovery*** as there are AI practitioners. These steps, drawn from the Appreciative Inquiry Handbook, are what I use:

1. Determine who will be involved
    - in selecting the topic, creating questions, conducting interviews and making sense of the findings
    - as interviewees (inquiry partners)
2. Select the affirmative topic – what do we aspire to?
3. Develop questions to explore the topic. The best AI questions:
    - Are constructed with a positive tone
    - Offer a broad definition of the topic – but leave plenty of room for interpretation and exploration
    - Are an invitation to be expansive and expressive
    - Use unconditional positive regard to build rapport and openness
    - Enhance the potential for storytelling and personal narrative
    - Value the person speaking and "what is" from their perspective
    - Evoke aspirations, values and dreams
4. Conduct interviews and organize the data collected
5. Make sense of the inquiry data

Regardless of the selected topic, the interview guide is constructed using a particular rhythm:

- an opening question focused on peak experiences
- three to five positively-framed questions centered around the topic
- winding-down questions that explore life giving factors, ending with a concluding question typically framed as either the "dream" (It is the year 2XXX and you've awakened from a long sleep to find…..) or "three wishes" (what three wishes do you have for …..).

Constructing an Interview Guide

I created a guide to interview successful low-income first generation college graduates as a way to better understand the resources, strategies and strengths used by them. A copy of my full interview guide is included in the appendix. For readability, I've also provided a highly abbreviated sample of the interview questions:

Opening *(sets the tone and direction of the interview; and begins with things that are most relevant to the person being interviewed):*

1. Without being humble, describe what you most value about:
   - Yourself
   - The way you navigated your college experience

Topic Exploration *(framed in a positive way)*

- In your college journey, you probably experienced both high and low points. I am interested in all of your experiences, but in particular I'd like to understand how you leveraged resources to create high points and successes.
  - I'd like you to think now about a peak moment, something extraordinary that occurred during your college experience - one that fills you with pride and a sense of accomplishment. Tell me a story about the circumstances and what happened.
  - Think for a moment about other people in your life….and remember someone who supported your goal to graduate from college. Tell me a story about that time; who was this person and what did they do?
  - What strengths did you draw upon to make the transition from high school to college?

Closing *(builds upon the topic questions and is framed "as if" the desired future already exists)*

1. Imagine that you fall in to a deep sleep tonight and don't wake up for five years. While you are sleeping a miracle has happened and 100% of high school graduates are now attending and graduating from college. As you awaken and open your eyes what do you see happening that is new, positive, and different? What are people saying and doing?

I created these questions and they represent things about which I'm curious. While I am a first-generation college graduate and I was low-

income when I was enrolled in college, my experience is thirty years old. I am outside the current social world of contemporary students. The interview questions might be different if they had been created by a cross-section of the stakeholders who inhabit the current system – students, parents, teachers, administrators, etc. It does not mean that my questions are wrong; however, they might miss important elements. This reinforces the need for wide collaboration both in selecting the topic and generating questions for the inquiry. I recognized this as a short-coming in developing my interview guide. To counterbalance, I tested the guide with two recent college graduates and invited them to add or modify questions. And I ended each interview with a question, *"Is there anything else that you wished I had asked you, but did not?"*

Conducting an AI Interview

Once developed, the AI interview guide, provides a framework and starting point. The interviewer must be prepared, however, to allow the conversation to lead to those places to which it naturally moves - to be generative. While the AI interview guide acts as a map, it is more a topographical map than a street guide. It contains the most essential and relevant information but the details are left to be filled in within the conversation.

Mining for Gold – Synthesizing the Interview Data

Whether the appreciative interview is conducted with one person or a thousand, the interview findings need to be collected and synthesized. Like all aspects of an AI process, findings are reviewed with a desire to find illustrations of what is working well, high point stories and positive examples of things at their best. Like mining for gold – these findings are the nuggets that represent "*the positive core"* of the organization. The AI Handbook (Cooperrider et al., 2005) notes the *positive core* as "*one of the greatest, yet least recognized resources in the change management field today.*" It goes on to say that the *positive core* is central to – but separate from – the 4D Cycle. This is because the *positive core* exists, with or without, AI or the 4D cycle. The 4D cycle becomes a tool that identifies and energizes the factors that represent the *positive core*. These then, are the central findings.

AI reports are often filled with rich narrative and thick descriptions of the positive core that were revealed within the interview dialogues. The data can be displayed in traditional ways such as diagrams, charts and tables. But it can also be shared through stories, pictures, newsletters and videos. Regardless of the format, the attempt is to generate themes that emerge within the stories, examples and information shared by those interviewed. It is common to share themes, descriptors and representative stories with those who have been interviewed. These themes are then fed in to the next phase of the cycle – ***Dream***.

DREAM – WHAT MIGHT BE?

"One of the basic theorems of the theory of image is that is the image which in fact determines what might be called the current behavior of any organization. The image acts as a field. The behavior consists of gravitating toward the most highly valued part of the field."

Kenneth Boulder (from The AI Handbook)

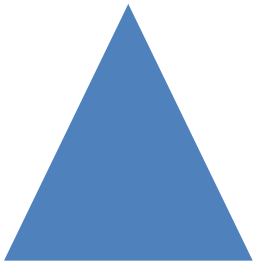
People, and organizations, tend to move in the direction of those things that occupy their conversations and thoughts (Cooperrider et al., 2005). Again, Cooperrider could have named this phase brainstorming or idea generation. But the notion of a "dream" evokes a much greater sense of possibility and expansiveness. Dreams often contain wishes and desires that are seemingly impossible – but are made manifest.

The purpose of the Dream phase is to magnify and amplify the positive core in such a way as to challenge the status quo. It uses history (tangible examples of high points, successes and the extraordinary events that were shared during the AI interviews) as both an anchor point and a catalyst. This is important both from a conceptual and practical view point. Lifting up examples of what has already been done serves to give confidence that it is possible to do again, raising the confidence level of people. And by delineating those things that make the system strong and viable, a conscious choice can be made to take these things (positive core) into the future.

Multi-stakeholder Dialogue - The Power of Scalability

It can be very useful in the Dream phase to have representatives of all stakeholder groups together to share stories and examine relationships. As multiple stakeholders share and compare stories, a deeper historical narrative emerges.

The power of AI is enhanced by its scalability – it can easily be used with a large number of people. In 2006, I used AI with a global industrial company who wanted to reorganize a business unit without losing the essence of what had made it successful, "its common core." I worked with a team of six business unit leaders to select the topic and create an interview guide. The team was trained to use the guide and to conduct interviews. Those interviewed, went on to conduct a second set of interviews. This "waterfall" approach expanded the team's ability to gather information from people at all levels of the organization.



I used the guide to interview the 5 leaders ***(5 stories)***

The 5 leaders each interviewed 5 employees ***(25 stories)***

Each of these employees interviewed 3 additional employees ***(75 stories)***

The findings from these interviews were reviewed for themes and the stories that brought the themes to life. Findings, along with selected quotes, were posted on long sheets of paper in a visible place. Employees were invited to add quotes or things which might have been missed in the interviews. In this way, many key stakeholders were brought into the conversation and were impacted by stories that they may not have heard before. As a social system, stakeholders will find threads of commonality that support the creation of a shared vision – the **Dream**.

Design – How Can it Be?

"Organizational transformation is much more than the critical mass of personal transformation. It requires macro-level changes in the very fabric of organizing, the social architecture."

Diana Whitney

The Design phase offers the opportunity to create processes and structure necessary to support the desired future vision (our Dream) and make it sustainable over time. These processes and structure are not arbitrary but are grounded in the history and tradition discovered in the inquiry process. This "grounding" is significant as it is what links theory to practice in the AI process. Grounded theory is an approach and methodology to doing research in which theory is formed inductively from the data (rather than deductively as when you begin with a theory and look for data to support it). This then, is the theory-building to which Cooperrider and Shrivasta refer.

The Provocative Proposition

The output of this process is a series of statements of possibility or *provocative propositions* (Cooperrider et al., 2005). Provocative propositions are statements of the desired state, framed as if they had already happened. They are "provocative" in that they challenge or stretch the status quo. The purpose of provocative propositions is to keep the strengths found during the Discovery process, the best, at a visible and conscious level (Hammond, 1998). A provocative proposition is focused on generating the ideal set of circumstances that support doing "what works." There will be many provocative propositions generated by the various stakeholder groups, and together they will form a set of directions that move people toward their positive vision of the future.

Building on the theme of education, a set of provocative propositions developed by the High School Counselors stakeholder group might look something like this:

As High School Counselors, we believe that every student can succeed beyond high school. We see ourselves as partners with students, teachers, administration and parents.

- *We have an "open door" policy and our offices are a welcoming space.*
- *We have created an alliance for the mutual enrichment of students, teachers, parents and alumni.*
- *We talk with each of our students at least twice a year.*
- *We ask our partners what they need and how we can provide it.*
- *We anticipate needs and have information available for our students, parents and teachers.*
- *We are part of a powerful learning community that supports shared knowledge, continuing education opportunities and mutually beneficial relationships.*
- *We feel supported by all members of our school and are confident that we all want the success of our students.*

The propositions listed would spark conversations about what is needed to create the systems and processes necessary to bring these propositions into reality. For instance, if we are discussing the best ways for High School Counselors to communicate with the various partners, is this best done in person, by email, by telephone, in groups (large and small) or one-on-one. It might include a discussion of new and novel ways of communicating, such as using social media. It might include benchmarking data collected from schools whose guidance counselors are considered "best in class." Or perhaps embrace collaboration with stakeholders who have been under-utilized in the past, such as grandparents or community retirees.

The Wish List

A typical product of these discussions is a "wish" or idea list accompanied by possible solutions and the name of an individual who takes ownership of it. For instance, a wish list for the provocative proposition "*We have an 'open door' policy and our offices are a welcoming space"* might look something like this:

Wish	Solutions to Explore	Champion / Owner	Report Back Date
More time for conversations with partners	1. Fewer and more effective meetings. 2. Reduce or eliminate administrative duties that don't add value to our partners. 3. Stagger our start/end times so that someone is in the counseling offices from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.		
Create a welcoming space	4. Bring in comfortable chairs 5. Paint the walls – don't leave them institutional white 6. Don't sit behind your desk when you meet with partners 7. Make office look more like home – bring in personal things like lamps, pictures, curtains 8. Fill book case with interesting books, articles and resources that can be given, or lent 9. Frame your college diploma and hang in office 10. Hang a pendant or flag from your college alma mater on your door 11. Ask local florist to donate fresh flowers for the front desk		

These potential solutions might be explored by an individual or a team. Findings are brought back to the stakeholder group for further discussion and action.

Destiny – What Will Be?

*"Allow yourself to **dream** and you will **discover** that **destiny** is yours to **design**."*

Jackie Stavros

The last phase in the 4-D process is Destiny, sometimes called Delivery. In the Destiny phase the thinking, dreaming and planning become reality. In this way, Destiny is a bridge of sorts. Like all aspects of the AI 4-D process,

dialogue is a key element. The provocative propositions are reviewed and often revised. The design elements are discussed and broad consensus is sought for implementation. Additional interviews may be conducted with people missed in the earlier process, or those who are new to the system. In this phase the foundation for continuous learning, creativity and improvisation are emphasized. According to Cooperrider, Destiny is the phase in which there is the most variability in approach (Cooperrider et al., 2005). Each individual, group or organization must decide the best way to sustain the design that emerges during the Dream Phase.

Implications for Coaching

When I started using appreciative inquiry 15 years ago, there was limited research to support the value of appreciative/positive practices outside of Cooperrider's work. I continued to use them because I knew that they made a difference in my life and the lives of my coaching-partners. However, there is now a substantial, and growing, body of research that focuses on the benefits of incorporating strengths-based practices into your life. Much of this research emanates from within the discipline of psychology, in particular, the branch known as positive psychology. Although positive psychology shares AI's focus on strengths and positivity, the two are not synonymous. Positive psychology remains rooted in an individualistic view of the person and his or her "psychological processes." By contrast appreciative inquiry situates strengths and positivity as things constructed by people in their interactions.

Many of the processes and tools used in Persistence Coaching are drawn from strengths-based research, including positive psychology. Regardless of the practice I use, I take care to situate constructs such as strengths, resilience, and positivity as relational rather than individual resources.

Optimism and Resilience

"For almost a hundred years aptitude and talent have been the code words for academic success…I've come to think that notion of potential without the notion of optimism,has very little meaning."

Martin Seligman, Learned Optimism

Psychologist, Martin Seligman's work (1998) in the areas of optimism and resilience has direct implications for college students. Based on research conducted on the University of Pennsylvania Class of 1987, freshmen students who did better than expected based on their admission scores entered college as optimists. Those who did worse than expected entered as pessimists. These findings were replicated with incoming West Point cadets. Seligman and his team identified pessimism as a particular explanatory style:

- It's me (*personal*)
- It's going to last forever (*permanent*)
- It's going to undermine everything I do (*pervasive*)

Resilience is the ability to bounce back quickly from life's set-backs. College, particularly the transition to college, can be rife with challenges and setbacks. The challenge of keeping up with college-level reading, disappointing marks on a term paper and failing a mid-term exam can send students in to a tailspin. Research shows that a more useful and success-building explanatory style can be practiced to build levels of optimism that lead to resilience (Seligman, 1998; Reivich and Shatte, 2002). These forms of language practice are built into Persistence Coaching.

Positivity and the Positivity Ratio

Social Psychologist, Barbara Fredrickson has developed a theory called 'broaden and build.' It shows that positivity leads to measurable outcomes (Fredrickson, 2009; Fredrickson and Branigan, 2005). Fredrickson positions positivity as a means to an end result. Some of the results shown by Fredrickson's research are that positivity

- Creates success in life (school and work)
- Improves your immune system and makes you healthier
- Builds resilience – allows you to bounce back faster from setbacks
- Expands your view – literally and figuratively

Persistence Coaching includes resource-building activities that helps Students build their positivity to negativity ratio to at least 3:1, the target for flourishing (Fredrickson, 2009).

Belief in Wholeness

Persistence Coaching starts from the premise that students are whole, capable and full of potential. The fact that a student has enrolled in college (or aspires to college) indicates that they already have a depth of resources available to support them in success. Persistence Coaching works to identify those resources, make them visible and co-create ways to use them effectively in college. Further, it draws from the work in positivity, optimism and resilience to create additional resources.

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[1] Six Sigma is a registered trademark of Motorola, Inc.

[2] The information in this chapter is heavily drawn from two sources, Cooperrider and Srivastva's 1987 article "Appreciative inquiry in organizational life" published in Research in Organizational Change and Development and *The Appreciative Inquiry Handbook* written by Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros, published in 2005. Some information is my opinion based on my experience using AI. I believe I have distinguished between my views and those things drawn directly from the published literature on AI. I have attempted to be diligent in citing these works but you may feel that I have omitted a citation, for which I apologize.

EDUCATION

EDUCATION – THE KEY TO A GOOD LIFE

AN INTRODUCTION AND INVITATION TO YOU

This chapter is a cultural study. It will examine some of the complex and interrelated features of education as practice. I want to highlight for you the historical, social and power structures that sustain education in its current form. In particular, I want to make visible an injustice created by an accident of birth. The geographic, social and economic location of my birth family matters. I want to make the case that, regardless of country, education poverty is inexorably tied to income and class status. Poor and low-status children are always the losers under this scenario. In this chapter, I want to illuminate:

- The education options afforded to a child born to a wealthy family versus one in poverty.
- The precariousness of even the most basic education for children born in countries ravaged by war and insurrection.
- The limited opportunities afforded to girls born in countries where religious or social credos devalue females.
- The disproportionate, unequal and uneven education for some children in very wealthy nations, such as the United States.
- The corrosive and debilitating impact to students caused by introducing profit and shareowner wealth to higher education[1] in the United States.

If you agree that education is a right rather than a privilege, then I believe some of what you read will anger you, as it did me. Vivien Burr writes that knowledge and social action go together[2] (Burr, 2003). There are injustices in the U.S. that create barriers to higher education. I experienced some of these barriers thirty years ago but many are unique to this place and time in history.

My social action is: placed where I am (the U. S.), uses what I know (coaching processes and methodology), in service of people about whom I care (low-income first generation students), operationalized by a relational process (Persistence Coaching). I want these students to share in the same

financial and social benefits afforded to me after I completed a college degree. Social justice is impossible so long as education poverty exists.

I hope that something in this chapter will motivate you to look at education poverty in your community. Education poverty may reside inside a single classroom or be embedded throughout the educational system. Education poverty may impact new immigrant populations, native peoples, children made invisible in the under-classes, or the child who is "different." If you look for them, you will find children living in education poverty in your community. I encourage you to use Persistence Coaching as a resource. At its heart, Persistence Coaching is about being in conversation with a student, creating relational resources, and generating dialogue about things that are important in his or her life. This conversation can happen at any age, in any language, at any time, with any student (or students).

The level of detail in this chapter can be mind-numbing, but it is intentional. I want to make a strong case for social action. Following is a high-level overview of the chapter organization. I offer this as a roadmap to your reading. In this chapter I:

- Locate the practice of education in a historical context
- Provide an overview of public education in the global community
- Question the status of education as a basic human right
- Discuss the concept of education poverty
- Examine the many risks to education
- Position education as a multiplier for other human rights and outcomes
- Discuss the state of education, in particular higher education, in the United States
- Make the case for action vis-à-vis Persistence Coaching

EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

"Postsecondary education is a gateway to the middle class for millions of Americans."

Tom Harkin, U. S. Senator

In the 21st century, education plays a central role in assuring individuals, families, and communities access to those things that ensure a healthy and fulfilling life. This is true regardless of birth country. Even in the most remote developing nation,[3] where farming is the primary source of family income, access to a minimum threshold of education increases the probability of children living past infancy, improves maternal health, and increases crop yields.[4] For individuals in developed nations education is necessary to prevent poverty, improve health outcomes and ensure full participation in civil life (Baum et al., 2010). The level of education needed to ensure "a good life" will vary by country and region. For children in developing nations, each year of primary education yields measurable benefit. For children in highly developed countries where primary and secondary education is compulsory, the minimum threshold for education is significantly higher.

Holding a college degree in the U.S. is to be considered as "well educated." For much of the 20th century, the U.S. led the world in the proportion of its citizens who graduated from college. The composition of college graduates changed during this time period from being predominately affluent white males to include females and people of color. One factor in the "democratization" of college attendance was the G.I. Bill,[5] which provided educational benefits directly to returning World War II veterans (rather than providing it to the educational institutions). It is generally agreed that the increasing number of Americans[6] with advanced education was a contributing factor to the economic boom experienced by the U.S. in the second half of the 20th century. Simultaneously, individuals with a college education moved in significant numbers into the middle and upper-middle income classes. The ranks of the college educated have historically excluded and marginalized certain segments of the population, in particular, the poor. The poor are disproportionately people of color and rural Americans.

To understand the obstacles and potential payoff for increasing the number of low-income and first-generation college graduates in the U.S. it is useful to view education as a socially constructed system with traditions, embedded structures and power relationships. Viewing education within this larger mosaic provides context and aids in understanding the contemporary narratives that surround education in the United States. Understanding these narratives allows us to critically examine them and their usefulness in practice.

There is a risk in reviewing the state of U.S. education in a global context - it has the potential to trivialize the current condition and the need in the United States. In 2010, almost all adult in the U.S. were functionally literate; they were able to decipher a bus schedule, sign documents and read a newspaper. At first glance it is difficult to see how completing a tertiary course of study, generally called college in the U.S., could hold any import next to learning to read or write. But this would miss the point. Although the contexts are vastly different, the underlying issues of marginalization and patterns of poverty-based exclusion are the same. Education is a gateway to power, self-determination and wealth. It is a core identity-shaping process: for individuals, communities and nations. Education is a multiplier (Kalantry, Getgen and Koh, 2009; Tomasevski, 2006).

The benefits to education seem clear, yet the conversations surrounding education in the U.S. can be confounding and contradictory. Students who drop out of the school system are blamed for their personal failure, creating a culture of separation and alienation (Gergen and Gergen, 2003). Rather we could choose to view leaving school as a by-product of a relationship gone awry. Children are often viewed as passive participants in an adult-constructed system rather than co-creators and active participants in creating knowledge. In some societal segments learning and education is valued. In others, education is tainted through its depiction in popular culture. Entire school districts, cities full of children, are failing to be educated with the level of knowledge necessary for them to partake in all of the benefits of civil society (Baum et al., 2010). This failure can be measured both in terms of schools who fail to meet a state's minimum accreditation standards and the number of its students who fail to

graduate from high school. At least ten state governments have taken over local school districts in hopes of disentangling the schools from local social and political forces.[7] Yet the United States spends more of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on education than any other nation in the world (Aud et al., 2011). With so many stakeholders and resources focused on this issue it is hard to understand how the outcomes could continue to disappoint.

Historical Context

Public education is a recent phenomenon. For most of history, the training of children has been the domain of family, village elders and religious institutions. Knowledge was passed on through story-telling and other oral traditions; basic skills needed for cooking or farming were learned in the home; complex skills were learned through apprenticeships or in guilds. Advanced education, including the skills of reading and writing, were limited to the nobility or the clergy. Many factors, including technological advances, shifts in economic systems, changes in societal expectations and the role of church in secular life, led to the formalization of education through public institutions. A full discussion of these factors is beyond the scope of this dissertation. This dissertation will focus instead on the current state of public education and will reference historical factors only when they serve the purpose to anchor or illuminate a point.

There are many public, private and governmental organizations focused on education. An internet search using the Google search engine conducted on December 3, 2011, of the phrase "education-focused organizations" resulted in more than 320 million findings ranging from government departments of education to philanthropic foundations. It would be impossible to include even a representative sample of data from all of these organizations. Rather, this dissertation focuses on data, statistics and information produced by institutions who have significant research initiatives focused on education and whose work is frequently cited within other sources, in particular: the United Nations, The World Bank, the Organization for Economic Development (OECD), the U.S. Department of Education, The Lumina and The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundations.

The State of Public Education - Global

Education as a Basic Human Right

"All human beings are born with equal and unalienable rights and fundamental freedoms.....These rights belong to you."

Adopted and proclaimed by United Nations General Assembly, December 1948

Education has been recognized as one of the basic human rights for more than sixty years. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted by the United Nations on December 10, 1948. The atrocities committed against people during World War II were the catalyst for consideration of the "essential rights of man" and the creation of a set of principles that would bind all countries (EFA GMR 2011 p3). The UDHR is the first global declaration of rights intended to extend to all human beings regardless of race, gender, religion or national origin. The UDHR provisions are significant in that they elevate the right to education as a basic human right equal to other rights such as those to health, work, and housing. The UDHR is available in more than 300 languages making it the most translated document in the world according to The Guinness World Book of Records.

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides specificity and clarity of this right:

1. Everyone has the right to education. Elementary education should be free and legally required (compulsory). More advanced education such as technical, professional and tertiary schools should be accessible to all – solely based on merit.
2. Education should fully develop human potential. It should strengthen respect for human rights and basic freedoms; promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups. Education should be an instrument of peace.
3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

HUMAN RIGHT OR GOAL?

As a declaration rather than a treaty, the UDHR is not legally binding even for the countries who have signed it. However, specific rights to education have been recognized and codified by a number of other international conventions and treaties, which are legally binding to those countries who ratify them. These include:

- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 1966)
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD, 1969)
- Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979)
- Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2008).

Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, more than 130 countries have included the right to education as a protected human right under their nation's constitution (EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010). By enacting the "Right to Education Law" in 2010, India became the most recent country to make free and compulsory education legally binding (www.thehindu.com, accessed 8/23/11).

Education is not a protected right under the United States constitution. And although the U.S. signed the ICESCR in 1977, it has never been ratified by the United States Congress.[8] In fact, the United States is one of approximately 50 countries that does not formally recognize the "rights of the child" including an obligation to provide free and compulsory education under international law (Tomasevski 2006). The United States is a major driver for both policy and funding to developing nations, which seems to put it in an awkward position of requiring and funding rights that it has not codified into law for its own population.

EDUCATION POVERTY – MEASURING THE MARGINALIZED

"Statistics are human beings with the tears wiped off."

Paul Brodeur

The United Nations agency with primary responsibility for education is UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). One of UNESCO's duties is to gather and publish data relevant to the state of education. The *Education for All (EFA) Monitoring Report* is published annually.

Beginning in 2010, the EFA Monitoring Reports include a new benchmark measure called "Education Poverty." The purpose is to capture information on the social composition of marginalized groups within a country and to measure the scale of occurrence. This analysis allows examination of the processes and characteristics of those who are excluded from education. In particular it seeks to understand the bottom 20% of the national distribution – those who receive the least education.

Four years of education is considered to be the minimum necessary to acquire basic literacy and numeracy. Less than four years of education is an indicator of extreme disadvantage (EFA GMR 2010 p9).Less than four years of education, has been established as the benchmark for Education Poverty. Less than two year's education is the benchmark for Extreme Education Poverty. Findings for sixty-three developing countries show that a significant portion of people live in educational poverty:

- **Education poverty**: In 22 countries, 30% or more of those aged 17-22 have fewer than four years education. This percentage rises to 50% or more in eleven countries in sub-Saharan Africa.
- **Extreme education poverty:** In 26 countries, 20% or more of those aged 17-22 have fewer than two years of schooling. In some countries, such as Burkina Faso and Somalia, the percent rises to 50% or more.

One of the most potentially impactful features of the new database is the ability to understand the characteristics of those who are marginalized within a society. It may highlight, for instance, links to specific factors such as poverty, gender, primary spoken language, or religious affiliation. Understanding these important features can help unmask disparities within large groups of people and support policy designed to rectify these differences.

Accident of Birth

If a person is to be assured of an education that includes completion of secondary school it would be best to be born in a developed country. Or if born in a less developed country, you should be male, live in an urban center, and have parents with financial means, who also belong to the dominant religious and political groups. Anything less increases the risk that you will remain uneducated and frozen in a cycle of poverty.[9]

Geography

As of 2008, the United Nations estimated that 69 million primary-aged children[10] were not attending school. More than half of the world's out-of-school children live in just fifteen countries. Nigeria alone accounts for more than 8.5 million of these children. Pakistan and India account for an additional 13 million children not in school.

Some countries have made significant progress toward universal education. Ethiopia cut the number of out-of-school children from 6.5 to 2.7 million in less than a decade and Tanzania moved from less than half attending to nearly universal attendance. There is concern, however, that armed conflict and the current global economic conditions will negatively impact progress. Slippage is already noted in South Africa and Nigeria by the United Nations (EFA Global Monitoring Report 2011).

Class Status

Even in countries where access to education is considered to be a basic right, the educational divide between children born to rich parents as compared to poor parents is notable. For instance, in the Philippines, education poverty rates among the poor are four times the national

average, with girls accounting for a significant portion. Being born poor doubles the risk of being in the bottom 20% of any developing country (EFA GMR 2010).

Some countries have made investments in national technical and vocational programs designed to reach young adults who "missed out" on basic education. In general though, these are viewed as a form of second-class education and are generally shunned by both parents and students (2010 EFA GMR, p7).

GENDER

Of the 759 million adults in the world who are illiterate, two thirds are women (EFA GMR Highlights). Obstacles that prevent girls from participating in education include all of those that impact their brothers: including poverty, rural locale and fee-based policy design. These barriers can be further complicated by relational and societal obstacles that serve to multiply the impact to girls. In Turkey, the national average for children with less than two years of schooling is 6%. Among poor Kurdish girls, however, the rate increases to 43%. In Nigeria, 97% of poor Hausa-speaking girls have less than two-years of school. In Yemen, nearly 80% of girls are out of school as compared to 36% of boys out of school (Highlights of EFA Report 2010).

The reasons for these differences between boys and girls are complicated but are rooted within culture, belief systems and lack of policy enforcement. For instance, the practice of child marriage most directly impacts females who are given in marriage by their parents at a much younger age and to men who tend to be much older than the girls. In some regions girls marry as young as age seven. In Niger and the Democratic Republic of Congo, more than 70% of girls are married before age 18 (UNFPA Fact Sheet, 2005). The inferior position of women is embedded in many of the world's religious beliefs and practices. And the practice of gender-preference for male children is operationalized in many ways from killing female babies, to keeping girls out of school, to confining girls to work in and out of the household.

The Legacy of Failure

Ignorance lasts a lifetime. Children who do not have the opportunity to attend school become adults who cannot read, write or do basic math computations. These deficiencies are difficult to remedy once a person reaches adulthood and must work to earn a living wage. The estimates for global illiteracy[11] vary, but all are significant. The 2010 EFA Monitoring Report calls adult literacy one of the most neglected education goals; it estimates that 759 million adults lack basic literacy skills.By the 2011 Publication of the EFA Global Monitoring Report, the estimate had been raised to 796 million adults unable to read or write.

Donor aid and public policy generally do not focus on the needs of the adult illiterate. Those who reach adulthood without basic skills are sometimes referred to as a "lost" generation without the skills necessary for employment. Although some countries, such as Brazil and India, have national strategies for dealing with this population, most, including the U.S., do not.

Free or Fee?

The UDHR requires that primary education be both compulsory and free. But policy and practice are often not aligned. Even in countries where primary education is compulsory, it is often not free, creating a defacto barrier to entry for poor children.

In 2006, Katarina Tomasevski, the first United Nation's Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, published a report on the status of free primary education in countries around the world. "The State of the Right to Education Worldwide: Free or Fee" was researched and published after she left the United Nations. It is a damning report on the reality of free primary education as required by governing international law. The findings support that there is a pattern of excluding poor children from access to primary education when they cannot pay admission or tuition fees, purchase text books, or wear a required uniform. Tomasevski calls this "poverty-based exclusion." The research conducted by her team found evidence of more than 22 different types of charges levied for the privilege of attending primary school. These included:

- Charging school tuition
- Charging test or certificate fees
- Requiring the purchase of books and learning materials
- Requiring that children purchase and wear a school uniform
- Requiring parents to pay, or supplement, teacher salaries

Children whose parents cannot pay these fees are either forced to work at school or are barred from attending.

Confounding the situation is the way the fees are levied and the fact that they are called by different names from country to country. The World Bank calls these "user fees" and simply states that they are not promoted or supported by the World Bank. The World Bank does not, however, tie aid to removal of such fees (Tomasevski, 2006).

Children and Guns – an Unhealthy Mix

Between 2000 and 2010, more than 35 countries in the world experienced armed conflict. In low-income countries, the average duration of armed conflict was 12 years. The 2011 Education for All Global Monitoring Report titled *"The hidden crisis: Armed conflict and education*" outlines the major barriers to education faced by children who live in these countries. 28 million children (42% of the world's out-of-school primary-aged children) live in armed conflict. These children are more than twice as likely to die before their fifth birthday as children in other poor countries. Children, schools and teachers are being deliberately targeted in conflict.

- In 2009 there were more than 600 attacks on schools in Afghanistan (up from 347 in 2008)
- In Thailand's three southernmost provinces, nearly 100 students and teachers were killed or injured in 2008-2009.
- In the Democratic Republic of Congo, one third of reported rapes involve children, with 13% of those being against children under the age of 10.

The Butterfly Effect

Edward Norton Lorenz, an American mathematician and meteorologist, is attributed with coining the phrase "butterfly effect" to describe a notion within chaos theory wherein a small change in one part of a system can affect larger impacts in another part of the system.

The data used in reports published in 2010 and 2011 were gathered against the backdrop of the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. Although the economic crises emanated from the financial system in the developed world – the aftershocks reverberated around the globe. Particularly hard hit were the world's poorest countries and the children who live within them. Wall Street bankers and first-graders have little in common, but the fate of one seems to be in the hands of the other. The bankers gambled – the children lost. In the face of rising poverty, slower economic growth and pressure on government budgets, the right to education is at risk. The evidence for erosions of progress for universal primary education, and the UN's Millennium Development Goals, is mounting:

- Aid commitment to basic education fell by 22% in 2007 (EFA MR2010)
- Commitments are falling short of the US$50 billion pledged in 2005 (EFA MR 2010)
- Education accounts for only 2% of humanitarian aid (2011 EFA Global Monitoring Report).

Why It Matters

"Education is one of the most powerful instruments for reducing poverty and inequality and lays a foundation for sustained economic growth."

World Bank Website

"A world with extreme poverty is a world of insecurity."

Millennium Project Website

Increasingly, world advising and governing bodies recognize the potential of education as a positive influence and the global risks of wide-spread illiteracy and ignorance. At the Millennium Summit in September 2000, the member countries of the United Nations adopted the Millennium Declaration, committing their nations to the reduction of extreme poverty by 2015. Eight specific goals, known as The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), were developed as a result of the declaration. The goals include elimination of hunger, disease, and premature death. Significantly, education is recognized as a pathway to achieve the other goals. Millennium Development Goal Two is universal primary education by 2015. The goal includes a specific target and measurable indicators:

> **Target:** By 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.
>
> **Indicators** (as measured by UNESCO data):
>
> - Net enrollment ratio in primary education
> - Proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach grade 5
> - Literacy rate[12] of 15-24 year olds

Education as Multiplier

The right to education is often referred to as a multiplier right due to its ability to enhance other human rights when it is present – and jeopardize other human rights when it is absent (Kalantry, Getgen and Koh, 2009; Tomasevski, 2006). In practical terms, an individual who cannot read or write has limited opportunities to make a living wage; is more likely to be taken advantage of when negotiating contracts and agreements; cannot know with certainty that they have voted for the candidate of their choice; and must rely on others to understand their rights under prevailing law.

In 2010, UNESCO and the Education for All Global Monitoring Report released data that illustrates this multiplier effect. The following is adapted from the report and shows how education links to other Millennium Development Goals. Where the data is drawn from a single country or region, it is noted in parenthesis.

- Education beats poverty (MDG Goal 1)
  - One extra year of schooling increases earnings by up to 10%
  - Each additional year of school raises the country average GDP by 0.37%
- Education promotes gender equality (MDG Goal 3)
  - Children whose mothers have some secondary education remain in school for two to three years more than those with mothers who have less schooling (Latin America).
  - If women farmers are given the same level of education as their male partners, yields for maize, beans and cowpeas increase by up to 22% (Kenya).
- Education reduces child mortality (MDG Goal 4)
  - A child born to a mother who can read is 50% more likely to survive past age five.
  - Child vaccination rates are 19% when mothers have no education. The rate increases to 68% when mothers have at least secondary school education (Indonesia).
- Education helps improve maternal health (MDG goal 5)
  - The proportion of births assisted by skilled personnel is 60% among the poorest 20% of the population and 98% among the richest 20% of the population (Namibia).
  - Mothers with secondary education are twice as likely to give birth in health facilities as those with no education (Burkina Faso).

The U. N. estimates that 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty if all students in low-income countries left school with basic reading skills (EFA GMR 2011). The links between education and the education of mothers is significant.

The Purpose of Education

Arguably, the purpose and intent of formal education varies between stakeholder groups. For national governments, education is a way to ensure a trained workforce and economic stability. It is also a way to create and reinforce preferred knowledge. This preferred knowledge may

include use of a single official language, the sanctioned version of historical events, preferred political ideologies, the role and responsibility of citizenry and a shared view of national identity (Swain, 2005). For local governments, an educated population is the source of a skilled workforce: involved community citizens and the tax revenue necessary to support its operations. Businesses in the 21st century look to formal education to provide them with a pool of skilled workers whom they can employ and with customers who have sufficient income to purchase the goods they produce. For families, education is a source of skills and knowledge that enable them to get and keep jobs, which pay for the things they need and want in their lives. For some families, giving their children educational opportunities that exceed their own education level is a way of positioning them for a better and more prosperous life.

Education in Wealthy Nations

The issues and challenges surrounding education in wealthy developed countries are both similar and distinctly different. Nearly all children in developed countries complete primary education. And the vast majority of students finish secondary school. Public school education is both free and compulsory.

There are, however, familiar patterns of poverty-based exclusion, marginalization and differences in the quality and quantity of education children receive. Some social groups such as African Americans and Hispanics in the U.S.; Romani in the European Union; Aborigines in Australia and Maori in New Zealand have high rates of secondary school dropout as compared to the general population. These same groups are over-represented in adults who are under- or un-employed, are incarcerated, and who have limited upward mobility in society. In the new millennium, advanced education is a prerequisite for employment. The next section of this chapter is focused on the state of education in the United States of America, a country whose self-image of an educated citizenry is core to its identity as a world leader. I've selected the U.S. as a particular focus because it is where I live and it is home to my action research project using Persistence Coaching.

The social system of education in the U.S. is complex. It is also fraught with politics and differing points of view. I will highlight what I believe are some of the primary issues that energize the force field that keeps low-income students from college graduation.

- Education is not a right under U.S. Law
- Education funded by local property values is flawed and unfair
- Financial poverty leads to education poverty
- Colleges need to recognize the new student demographic and adapt
- Some Colleges fail in their mission – admitted students do not graduate
- The College-as-Business model prey on minorities and the poor
- Education is unaffordable and the resulting debt inescapable

Any one of these factors might provide a challenge that, with focus and effort, could be overcome. Taken together they create a mountain of obstacles, which can seem insurmountable, particularly to young adults who do not have the power to change them.

I do not believe that Persistence Coaching will correct the inequities in our system. I do believe, however, that Persistence Coaching can help low-income students understand their core strengths; learn to use them in service of their educational goals; and build up resources that will "inoculate" them from the negative messages and low expectations that they encounter. Persistence Coaching is a "wrap-around" to other actions, initiatives and programs – not a replacement.

The State of Public Education - USA

The Free Common School – Public Education

"The most American thing about America is the free common school system."

Adlai Stevenson

"The child learns more of the virtues needed in modern life-of fairness, of justice, of comradeship, of collective interest and action-in a common school than can be taught in the most perfect family circle."

Charlotte Perkins Gilman

The United States was founded on ideals of freedom, individual liberty, equality and the notions of self-governance and full participation in a democratic society. The "common" or "public" school was an idealized place where children from families of all walks of life would be educated together as a cornerstone of equality. Early leaders, such as Thomas Jefferson, believed that education was an important part of preparing individuals to be active and informed citizens ready to enjoy the benefits of a democratic society and be responsible for maintaining it.

A Study in Contradictions – Other People's Children

"By this means twenty of the best geniuses will be raked from the rubbish annually and be instructed …at the public expense, creating a new generation of leaders without regard to wealth, birth or accidental condition."

Thomas Jefferson (Notes on the State of Virginia, 1785)

Then as now, the ideal of the free common school did not live up to the image. In colonial days, children of the wealthy were educated by tutors and in boarding schools. They studied philosophy, Greek, Latin, world history and a set of classical literature. Thomas Jefferson was home schooled by tutors until the age of 16 at which time he continued his

education as a boarder at William and Mary College (The College of William and Mary website, 12/11/11).

Children of the lower classes, "the great unwashed," as described by Edward Bulwer-Lytton in his 1830 novel *Paul Clifford,* were considered uneducable and expected to work at a very young age at some form of manual labor. The case can be made that a similar separation occurs today. Those with a college degree are found in white collar jobs such as physicians, lawyers and teachers. Those with only a high school diploma end up in blue collar jobs found on the assembly line and in manual labor.

I find it interesting that many of the issues being debated in the United States are not new. Disputes over who should pay for education, the kind of education to be received by different categories of children; and which children should be excluded from public education have been around for a long time. I would characterize some of these issues as follows:

Issue: *Wealthy people do not want to pay for the education of poor children, at least not the quality of education received by their children.*

Historical Example	Contemporary Example
In 1790 the Pennsylvania constitution required free public education for poor children. Wealthy parents were expected to pay for their children's education.	The primary funding source of public school is through real estate property taxes. Valuable real estate (primarily owned by wealthy families) generates significant revenue for school districts. Low-value and rental property (primarily inhabited by poor families) generates less funding.

Issue: *Education is a political pawn.*

Historical Example	Contemporary Example
In 1923 Psychologist, Carl C. Brigham, wrote an influential book, which concluded that some races were of inferior intelligence. It warned that immigration policy should be carefully controlled to ensure "American intelligence."	In 1978, California voters passed Proposition 13, which freezes property taxes, the primary source of school funding. Over 20 years, California drops from first in the nation in per-student spending to 43rd out of 50 states.

Issue: *Education is viewed as a privilege rather than a right.*

Historical Example	Contemporary Example
It was illegal to teach African American slaves to read or write. By 1830 most Southern States had passed such laws and these remained on the books until after the Civil War.	Allowing the children of illegal immigrants, primarily Hispanics, to attend public schools remains a source of controversy.

Issue: *Education perpetuates separation of the wealthy from the poor*

Historical Example	Contemporary Example
In 1779 Thomas Jefferson proposes a dual-track system that separates the learned from the laboring.	In 2011, a homeless single mother in Bridgeport, Ohio was charged with first-degree larceny (theft) for enrolling her five-year old son in school using the address of a friend.

Issue: *Education is used as a tool to privilege an agenda set by the Dominant Culture*

Historical Example	Contemporary Example
In 1864 Congress passed a law making it illegal to teach Native American children in their first language.	In 1998 California passed a law making bi-lingual education illegal. The most direct impact was to Spanish speakers.

It seems to me that many of these issues can be linked to the fact that by law and practice education in not considered as a basic human right.

Not a Protected Right Under U. S. Law

The right to education is not included in the U.S. Constitution or Bill of Rights. In fact, the U. S. Supreme Court rejected the argument that education was a fundamental right under the constitution in 1973 in its ruling on San Antonio v. Rodriguez (Gormley, 2006). Education and the way in which it is funded and formed, is left up to each of the 50 states (Trachtenburg, 2005).

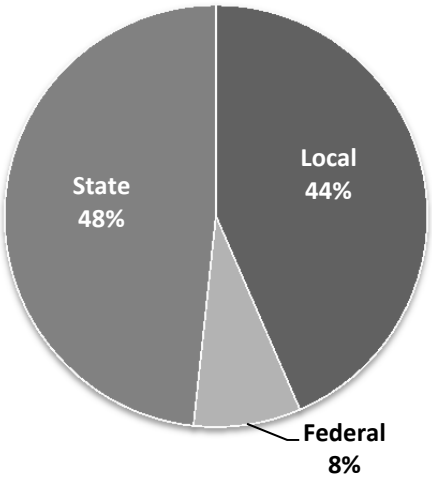
Until I did the research, I had no idea how little funding for education comes from the federal government. Given the rhetoric, I assumed that it was the major source of funding. In fact, it is less than 10%. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) tracks both the sources of education funding and how it is used. Figure E- 1 shows the U.S. average for school district funding sources in fiscal year 2008.[13]

As much as 90% of public school funding comes from local property taxes and state funding (if local taxes are insufficient).[14] On average, state governments account for 50% of education funding generated through taxes on things ranging from gasoline, to cigarettes and gambling profits. The remaining appropriations come from local communities primarily through real estate property taxes (U.S. Department of Education; National Center for Education Statistics; Worgs, 2005).

There is, however, a wide variance in the State-Local funding ratio. In Illinois and Nevada more than 60% of funding comes from local sources, making them particularly sensitive to changes in real estate values. In Vermont the local contribution is less than 8%.[15] Because the local portion of school funding comes primarily from taxes on real estate, it also perpetuates differences in the quality and quantity of educational outcomes. Expensive property (usually owned and occupied by wealthier families) generates much more revenue from taxes than rental and low-valued property (generally occupied by low-income families).

FIGURE E-1

School District Funding Sources - FY 2008



Source: The National Center for Education Statistics

The U.S. Department of Education creates and administers education policy, focused on school accreditation, curriculum, student attendance, and hiring. It is the local school districts, comprised of citizens elected to be school board members that have primary authority over budget and policies of the schools in their community.

Financial and Education Poverty – A Vicious Cycle

"Poverty is persistent. Poverty is concentrated. Poverty is compounded."

Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

It is difficult to uncouple financial poverty from other factors. Poverty[16] among children is highly linked to health and behavioral problems, educational difficulties, teen pregnancy and unemployment (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012). Although America sees itself as the "land of opportunity" with unlimited upward mobility, the circumstances of a person's birth largely predict life outcomes. Economic mobility for poor children is limited; 42% of those born in the bottom 20% of income will end up as adults in the bottom 20% (Solon, 1992). Unequal access to opportunity has a dramatic impact on life outcomes. Children born to a family in the bottom 20% of income earners:

- Have a 64% chance of graduating from high school by age 26
- Have only a 7% chance of completing a bachelor's degree by age 26
- Are likely to have negative net worth
- Are likely to live at or near the poverty level (average household income in 2001 was $10,440)
- Are likely to see dramatic swings in annual earnings from year to year

Barriers for the poor are many and seem to be increasing. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are more than 37 million poor people in the U.S. The fastest growing segment of the poor are those living below 50% of the Federal Poverty Level (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2007). Progress in reducing the number of people at or below the poverty rate seems to have stalled and economic gains are no longer shared equally among the population. According to data published in 2011 by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the household income of the richest 10% of Americans is about fourteen times the poorest 10% - a ratio of 14 to 1. Further, over the last 25 years, the richest decile saw their household income increase at an average rate of 1.9% per year. During the same period, household income in the lowest 10% grew at only 0.5% per year (OECD, 2011, Table 1).

Poverty - Not An Equal Opportunity

Poverty in the Unites States is not evenly distributed across state boundaries, within metropolitan areas or among races. Rather, poverty tends to be concentrated.

In 2009, 20% of children in the U.S. lived in poverty, but this varied widely from state to state. Figures E-2 and E-3 shows 2009 Child Poverty Rates for selected states and cities.

The poverty rate was higher for African American, American Indian and Hispanic children, in which more than one third lived in poverty.

Figure E-2 Children Living in Poverty – 2009
17 Selected States

Rank	State	%	**Graph** (Scale 11% - 31%)
	United States	**20%**	
1	New Hampshire	11%	
2	Connecticut	12%	
5	Massachusetts	13%	
11	Virginia	14%	
14	Nebraska	15%	
18	Maine	17%	
26	Illinois	19%	
29	New York	20%	
32	Missouri	21%	
38	Michigan	23%	
41	Texas	24%	
46	New Mexico	25%	
49	Arkansas	27%	
50	Mississippi	31%	

Source: 2011 KIDS COUNT Data Book, http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/acrossstates

A household in poverty is more likely to be led by a single woman than a single man and more likely to be headed by an adult who is African American or Hispanic. Single family households account for 2/3 of child poverty; children in the U. S. increasingly live in one-parent households (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation). In 2009, more than 1/3 of all children lived in single parent households. The rate is higher for Hispanic (40%), American Indian (53%) and African American (67%) children (2011 KIDS COUNT).

FIGURE E-3
TEN U. S. CITIES WITH THE HIGHEST RATE OF CHILD POVERTY (2009)

Rank	State	%	**Graph** (Scale 8% - 51%)
	United States	**20%**	
43	Columbus, OH	33%	
43	Philadelphia, PA	33%	
45	Dallas, TX	35%	
45	New Orleans, LA	35%	
47	Miami, FL	37%	
48	Milwaukee, WI	39%	
49	Memphis, TN	40%	
50	St. Louis, MO	42%	
51	Cleveland, OH	51%	
51	Detroit, MI	51%	

Source: 2011 KIDS COUNT Data Book, http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/acrossstates

CLUSTERING - HIGH POVERTY SCHOOLS

As stated earlier, in 2009 nearly one in five students ages 5 to 17 was a member of a family living in poverty. Students in poverty tend to be clustered by race in high-poverty schools.[18] Blacks and Hispanics are the most likely to attend a high-poverty school. For the 2008-09 school year,

44% of Black and 45% of Hispanic elementary students attended a high-poverty school as compared to 6% of their white peers.

The outcomes for high-poverty are measureable. The 2009 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) showed more than a 100 point score difference in reading ability between students in high-poverty high schools and those in the most affluent schools. Further, the lower scores correlate to concentration of student poverty. As illustrated in Figure E-4, the higher the percentage of poor students, the lower the average reading score. Reading is a fundamental academic skill, which impacts all other disciplines.

FIGURE E-4
AVERAGE SCORES OF U.S. 15-YEAR-OLD STUDENTS
PISA COMBINED LITERACY SCALES

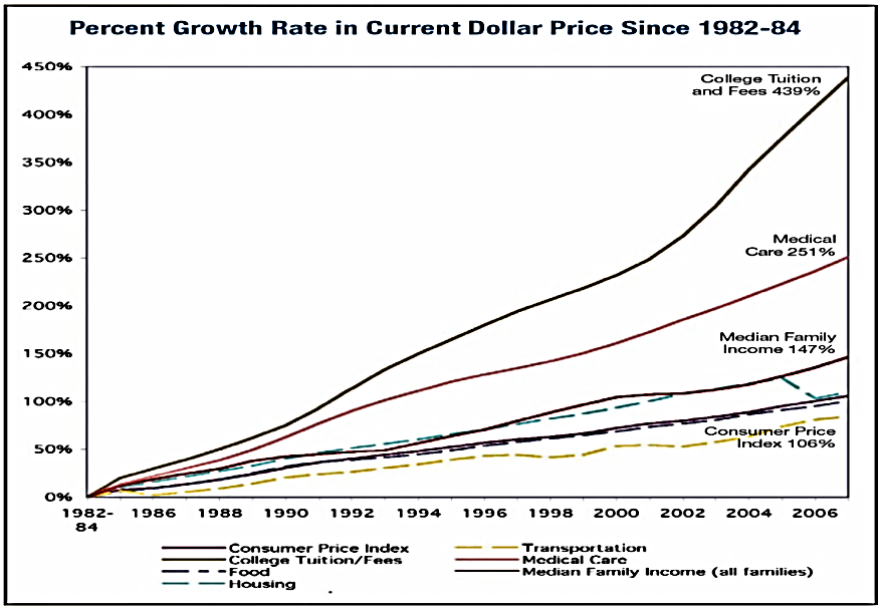
% Students Eligible for free or reduced price lunch		Score
Less than 10 percent		551
10 to 24.9 percent		527
25 to 49.9 percent		502
50 to 74.9 percent		471
75 percent or more*		446

*High-poverty school. Source: Highlights from PISA 2009, page 15.

AFFORDABILITY – A MAJOR BARRIER

In 2009, the total net price[19] of attending a public college as a full-time student was $19,300. At private, non-profit institutions that cost was $37,400. And while many students receive financial aid, the total out-of-pocket cost for families at all income levels has increased (IES 2011).

FIGURE E-5



Source: Meeting President Obama's 2020 College Completion Goal, July 2011

The cost of a college degree has increased much faster than the rate of inflation or median family incomes. Although increases in the cost of medical care receives significant attention by the American press and political pundits, the cost of college tuition fees has increased at almost twice the pace of medical care. As shown on Figure E-5, when held in constant dollars, the cost of tuition and fees increased 439% between 1982 and 2006. At the same time, family median incomes increased by 147%. Many students, and their families, have been priced out of college.

Those who do attend college often accrue debt to fund their education. Student debt levels have nearly doubled over the last 15 years. Today college seniors with student loans graduate with an average loan debt of $25,000. In 1996, that figure was approximately $12,500 (Remarks of U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to the annual Federal Student Aid Conference, November 2011).

21ST CENTURY STUDENT – THE MYTH OF THE CO-ED

The Hollywood image of college life, and college students, is highly inaccurate. The image of fresh-faced, book-carrying young people walking across campuses of ivy-covered buildings to attend day classes; meeting friends between classes at the student center; and sleeping and socializing in campus dormitories at night is fantasy. In the 21st century only a small minority, less than 15% of students, attend four-year colleges and live on campus. Most students work. 41% of full-time students and 76% of part-time college students were employed (IES 2011, p6, indicator 45). And, more than 1/3 of students work at full time jobs while taking college classes. A quarter of students are over the age of 30 and 37% are enrolled part-time (Lumina Foundation, 2011).

More than one-third of full-time college and university students need remedial classes that cover what they should have learned in high school. Students in the bottom quarter by income were more than twice as likely to take remedial courses as those in the top quarter (52 percent compared to 24 percent). 60 percent of students who complete a college degree earn them from a different institutions than the one in which they started. Older, part-time and working students used to be called "non-traditional" but they are now the norm. Many post-secondary institutions have not made the adjustment and are still organized around the needs of "traditional" students.

PERSISTENCE IS A CHALLENGE

Finishing a course of study, called persistence in the field of education, is hard. It is estimated that there are nearly 40 million working-age adults in the U.S. who have attended college but do not have a degree. This represents more than 22% of the U.S. working-age population (Lumina Foundation, 2011).

More young people are starting, but not finishing, college. Between 1970 and 2009, undergraduate enrollment in the United States more than doubled, while the completion rate has been virtually unchanged (Time is the Enemy, Complete College America).

Less than half of first-time, full-time students complete their four-year degrees within six years or two-year degrees within three years. Completion rates for minority students are even lower. According to U. S. Department of Education data, very significant difference in persistence exists between races and by type of institution attended:

- Asian/Pacific Islander students graduated at a rate of 67%
- White students at a rate of 60%
- Hispanic students at a rate of 49%
- Black students at a rate of 40%
- American Indian and Alaskan Native students at a rate of 38%.

Overall, private, not-for-profit institutions had the best graduation rates for each of the ethnic groups as compared to public and for-profit institutions. (IES 2011, Figure 23-1).

The reasons that individuals do not complete college can be personal, but they do tend to follow certain patterns. The Public Agenda conducted a study comprised of 614 students between the ages of 22 and 30 who had completed some college courses to better understand their opinions and views as compared to those who had completed a college degree. The number one reason that students gave for quitting college was that they needed to go to work to make money. Contrary to the view that parents were paying for college, 60% of the students in the study were paying for college themselves. And although most (65%) continue to think about returning to college, the major reason stopping them is that they do not think that they could both work and go to school at the same time. A majority of students in this study (62%) did not have scholarships or student aid and left with debt.

An 'F' in Mission 101 - Colleges That Fail

"Look to your left.....look to your right.....one of these students will not be here to graduate."

Often quoted remark made by Professors and Deans to freshmen students

Each fall more than a million students begin college as freshmen, all of whom envision themselves walking on stage to receive a college diploma in four or five years. Unfortunately, the data shows that fewer than 60% of them are likely to receive a college diploma within six years. In some institutions the percentage of students who successfully graduate is less than 10% (Hess et al., 2009).

You might assume that students who leave college before they earn a diploma are not academically prepared. Or, you might expect them to be clustered in noncompetitive schools that accept anyone with a high school diploma. You might also believe that students who manage to get admitted to more competitive schools simply get "weeded out" because they can't keep up with their peers. But you would be wrong. And until recently, it was almost impossible to compare graduation rates on an apples-to-apples basis.

In 1990 the U.S. Congress passed the *Student Right to Know Act*. This law requires all institutions to report their graduation rates[20] to the National Center for Education Statistics.

For the first time there is a way for parents, students, and researchers to "grade" colleges on how well they produce college graduates, which is what they are designed to do. In June 2009, The American Enterprise Institute published a research report titled, "*DIPLOMAS AND DROPOUTS: Which Colleges Actually Graduate Their Students (and Which Don't).*" Much of the information in this section is drawn from this report.

For the sake of argument, you could make the case that there are student differences in terms of ability and academic preparedness. Perhaps some students are not up to the academic rigors of Harvard University or Reed College, among the most selective institutions based on admission criteria (which I'll discuss in a moment). But you would expect that admitted students, the best and brightest based on high school grades and college admission exams, would leave Harvard and Reed with diplomas in hand. Data shows that 97% of Harvard's students graduate. But only 76% of Reeds College students leave school with a diploma (Hess et al., 2009).

That is more than a 20 percentage point difference in student outcomes. Something is happening here that is beyond the student.

Reeds College Tuition and Fees for 2012/2013 are listed as $56,000 for a year of study,[21] which means that 24% of its students leave empty-handed **having made a substantial investment.**

And lest you think that Reeds College is a fluke, I've created two tables from the information found in the *Diplomas and Dropouts* report. Figure E-6 is an overview of college competitiveness groupings using *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges.*

FIGURE E-6
U. S. COLLEGE SELECTIVITY[22]

Selectivity Category	Sample Schools	% Applicants Admitted	Min. Average Grade in High School	Average ACT Score
Most Competitive	Harvard, Yale, Reed	< 33%	A to B+	29
Highly Competitive	Babson, Smith, Stonybrook	33% - 50%	B to B+	27 - 28
Very Competitive	Pennsylvania State, Colorado Christian	50% - 75%	No lower than B-	24 - 26
Competitive	Westminster, Chicago State	75% - 85%	Range from B – to C	21 - 23
Less Competitive	Atlantic Union, National Louis	> 85%	Below C	< 21
Noncompetitive	Southern U. at New Orleans, Arkansas Baptist	All	Not considered	Not considered

Source: *Diplomas and Dropouts,* Hess et al., 2009.

Figure E-7 shows the disparity in graduation rates among schools that use the same admissions criteria. That is, they admit students who are roughly at the same level in terms of their ability to do college level course work.

FIGURE E-7
GRADUATION RATE BY COLLEGE SELECTIVITY[23]

Selectivity Category	Best Graduation Rate in Category	Worst Graduation Rate in Category
Most Competitive	97%	60%
Highly Competitive	89%	44%
Very Competitive	85%	8%
Competitive	89%	12%
Less Competitive	98%	9%
Noncompetitive	100%	8%

Source: *Diplomas and Dropouts,* Hess et al., 2009.

An apples-to-apples comparison of institutions with similar admission criteria[24] shows that there is a staggering difference in outcomes for admitted students.

It is impossible to know with certainty what drives these differences. For instance: teaching missions could be different, educational standards could be different, financial resources available to invest per student might vary, or some schools might offer more comprehensive student support

systems. Given the direct impact to students, the practices of those institutions most successful in graduating students bear closer study.

PROFITS POISON EDUCATION

"I believe in what Kaplan Higher Education does. I think its work benefits its students and in a sense benefits the country by educating people who need the education."

Donald E. Graham, CEO of The Post Company

"We're trying to walk a fine line to make sure the good actors are supported and bad actors can't take advantage of people trying to better their lives."

Arne Duncan, U. S. Education Secretary

While for-profit colleges[25] have always existed in the United States their growth has been explosive over the past few decades. Historically, these were thought of as "career" or "technical" colleges primarily focused on workers requiring a certificate or license such as cosmetology, court reporting, food preparation, and medical technology. Over the last 20 years, these institutions have expanded their offerings to include two year Associate's Degrees, four-year Bachelor's degrees, as well as Master's and Doctorate Degrees. They have become an important, and so far detrimental, player in the college market.

BUYING CREDIBILITY

In 1998, for-profit Kaplan (owned by the Washington Post Company) started an on-line law school in California, the first school of its kind in the U.S. The success of the school led to Kaplan's $165 million acquisition of Quest in 2000 giving it access to federal student funds and making it a major player in the for-profit post-secondary education industry (Mufson and Yang, 2011). Other for-profit institutions followed Kaplan's lead by growing their ranks of low-income students whose tuition was paid through federal grants and loans.

In 1999, 672 for-profit degree-granting institutions participated in Title IV Federal Funding.[26] By 2009 this number had grown to 1,104. In the same period, the number of public and non-profit post-secondary institutions declined slightly (IES 2011, Table A-42-2).

Another strategy for acquisitions was the credibility gained through buying small brick and mortar colleges with regional accreditation. One such acquisition in 2005 was of a small regionally accredited school with 332 students on campus. Five years later (with the same accreditation) the school had more than 65,000 students, 99% of whom attended class solely online (U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission filings as reported in Harkin June 24, 2010).

In 1980 the number of undergraduate students enrolled in private for-profit colleges was 23,000 students. By 2009, this number had grown to 1.2 million students, which accounted for 27% of the growth in post-secondary enrollment between 1990 and 2009 (IES 2011). The Washington Post reported that more than half a million students were enrolled in just two for-profit colleges in 2010 – the Apollo Group (405,300 students) and Education Management Corporation (157,200 students). Table E-5 shows the distribution of post-secondary enrollment growth between the three primary types of institutions based on data reported to the U. S. Department of Education.

Correspondent to the increase in student headcount is an increase in the number of degrees conferred by for-profit institutions. The number of bachelor's degrees conferred has more than quadrupled from 16,000 in 1999 to 85,000 in 2009. Graduate degrees account for a smaller, but growing, segment (IES 2011, Table CL-1).

FIGURE E-8
GROWTH IN POST-SECONDARY ENROLLMENT BY INSTITUTION TYPE

Institution Type	1980-1990 **1.5 million** additional students	1990-2000 **1.2 million** additional students	2000-2010 **4.4 million** additional students
Public	85%	69%	65%
Private Non-Profit	8%	14%	9%
Private For-Profit	7%	16%	27%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, *The Condition of Education 2011*, May 2011

FEEDING THE BEAST – OVER-RECRUITMENT

As Figure E-8 shows, students are increasingly choosing private for-profit institutions. Although the trend is clear, the numbers mask the larger story because they are based on annual enrollment numbers. For-profit colleges have a very high withdrawal rate, which means they must recruit very large numbers of students each year to maintain, or grow, their enrollment levels. In 2008-09, one school started the year with an enrollment of 71,246 students and ended the year with 89,479, an increase of approximately 18,000. However, the school reported adding 120,638 new students over the course of the year. To support net growth of 18,000, recruiters had to increase enrollment by 120,000 new students knowing that they would lose six or seven students for every one student who persists to the next year (Harkin, 2010). This pattern of over-recruitment existed for 14 out 16 schools studied by HELP Committee in 2010.

Serving the Under-Served

"Postsecondary education is a gateway to the middle class for millions of Americans."

Tom Harkin, U. S. Senator

In the fall of 2009, approximately 11% of all full-time undergraduate students were enrolled in private for-profit institutions. The demographics of students who choose for-profit colleges seem to differ from those who selected public or private non-profit colleges. A full-time student enrolled in a for-profit 4-year institution is likely to be 35 years of age or older, African American, lower income and slightly more likely to be female.[27]

Buyer Beware

"Until recently, I thought that there would never again be an opportunity to be involved with an industry as socially destructive and morally bankrupt as the subprime mortgage industry. I was wrong - the for-profit education industry has proven equal to the task."

Steve Eisman, Short-Sale Investor (as reported in Mother Jones, May 27, 2010)

Americans favor free-market competition and believe in the power of the profit motive. Given this, having for-profit post-secondary institutions in the marketplace would seem to be one way to increase innovation, reach a larger population of students, improve student outcomes and encourage efficiency to reduce costs. To date, this does not seem to be the case.

Fraud and Deceit

"I visited homeless shelters where for profit-colleges were seeking students."

Daniel Golden, Bloomberg News Reporter

The summer and fall of 2010 were difficult for the for-profit colleges industry after a series of revelations uncovered by government

investigations and news analysis.[28] The information disclosed information was unfavorable to the industry. Some of the more notable findings were:

- For-profit colleges receive a disproportionate level of federal aid. In 2009, for-profit colleges enrolled 12% of students but received 25% of all Pell Grants. Pell Grants do not have to be repaid by the student. But, if students withdraw the institution keeps the money.
- Among for-profit colleges, as much as 90% of revenue is generated by the federal government through grants and loans made to enrolled students. The average for the five largest for-profit schools was 77.4% in 2009. These figures do not include aid from the Department of Defense, Department of Veterans Affairs and state programs (Harkin, 2010).
- The default rate on student loans is extremely high – nearly 47% of students who were paying back loans in 2009, defaulted by 2010. Because the study period was short, the total default rate is expected to be much higher.
- Applicants were encouraged by some for-profit colleges to falsify financial aid forms in order to qualify for federal aid.
- Recruiters under-estimated the total cost of tuition by using a 9-month rather than 12-month class schedule frequently used by these institutions.
- Recruiters misrepresented the accrediting organization of their school.[29].
- Recruiters exaggerated potential salary after graduation. In one instance an applicant was told that barbers can earn up to $200,000 a year. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that 90% of barbers make less than $43,000 per year.
- Recruiters pressured applicants to sign a contract before allowing them to meet with a financial advisor about program costs and financing options.
- Recruiters present their programs as a good value to students. However, programs at for-profit institutions often cost substantially more than a comparable program at a public institution. As an example, one institution offered a massage therapy certificate

program for $14,000. The same certificate from a public community college cost $520.

Student Protection Unraveled by Politics

Many of the regulations that prevented abuses in this industry were reversed or not enforced during the administration of George W. Bush. In 2005, Congress repealed the "50 percent rule," which previously required that schools furnish no more than 50% of their courses online and have no more than 50% of students enrolled in distance learning courses. By 2010, four of the 14 publicly traded for-profit schools had more than 98% of student offerings online, with three additional schools having more than 50% online courses.

In Debt Without a Diploma – or a Job

> *"If there is a population that is more likely to default – low income – the last thing you want to do is saddle them with crushing lifelong debt."*
>
> Barmak Nassirian,
> American Association for Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers

By actively recruiting low-income students, the for-profit schools are able to tap in to federal funds designed to support low-income students in higher education. The schools keep the income generated by tuition and fees regardless of whether the student stays enrolled or graduates. It is the student, not the college, who must pay back student loans and these debts follow a person for life. Unlike other forms of debt, student loans are not forgiven even if the individual files for personal bankruptcy.

Because grants, which do not have to be repaid, are not enough to cover tuition and fees, almost all students at for-profit colleges take out student loans. Students who drop out even in the first few months can amass a significant amount of debt. More than 95% of students in two-year programs and 93% in four-year programs took out student loans in 2007. This is compared to 16.6% and 44.3% of students in public institutions during the same period (Harkin, 2010). The HELP Committee study found

that the average attendance at for-profit colleges was 20 weeks – just over one semester.

Expense or Investment?

Post-secondary education is expensive in the United States. Even at public universities, which are subsidized by tax dollars, the average annual cost[30] for 2009-10 at a four-year institution was nearly $15,000. This figure rises to more than $32,000 for students attending private four-year institutions.[31] The cost of a college degree has been increasing at a much higher rate than inflation. In the last decade the cost of a post-secondary degree at a public school has increased by 37% with the cost at private institutions increasing by 25%. Sixty-six percent of 2007–08 first-time bachelor's degree recipients borrowed to finance their degree, and of these, the average cumulative amount borrowed was $24,700.

Post-Secondary Education – The Key to Opportunity

"Postsecondary education has become the gateway to the middle-class."

Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce Website

In the last half of the 20th century compulsory attendance of secondary school gave the U.S. a commercial competitive edge. U. S. businesses had access to an educated workforce allowing them to translate innovation into mass-produced goods for sale to the world. Because manufacturing jobs were highly compensated, a high school diploma was the ticket to a solidly middle class life. In the last 25-30 years, there have been significant social and economic changes, which include globalization, advances in technology and deregulation of business. Taken together, these changes have dramatically reshaped the American workforce. Highly paid production line jobs have been moved overseas. The "employee contract," which once ensured life-long employment with a single company, was irrevocably broken through downsizing and restructuring. Job growth in the U.S. has skewed to low- and high-paying jobs, with middle-wage jobs declining (Auter et. al. 2006; Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2007; Lumina Foundation, 2010).

The Big Payoff

The fastest growing jobs in the U.S. require advanced education. For those who completed a post-baccalaureate degree during the last decade, the payoff was significant in terms of:

Earnings Potential

- The lifetime earnings differential for a college degree vs. high school diploma is $1 million.
- In 2008, adults with a bachelor's degree earned, on average, about 81 percent more than high school graduates; associate degree holders earned about 23 percent more.

Job Security

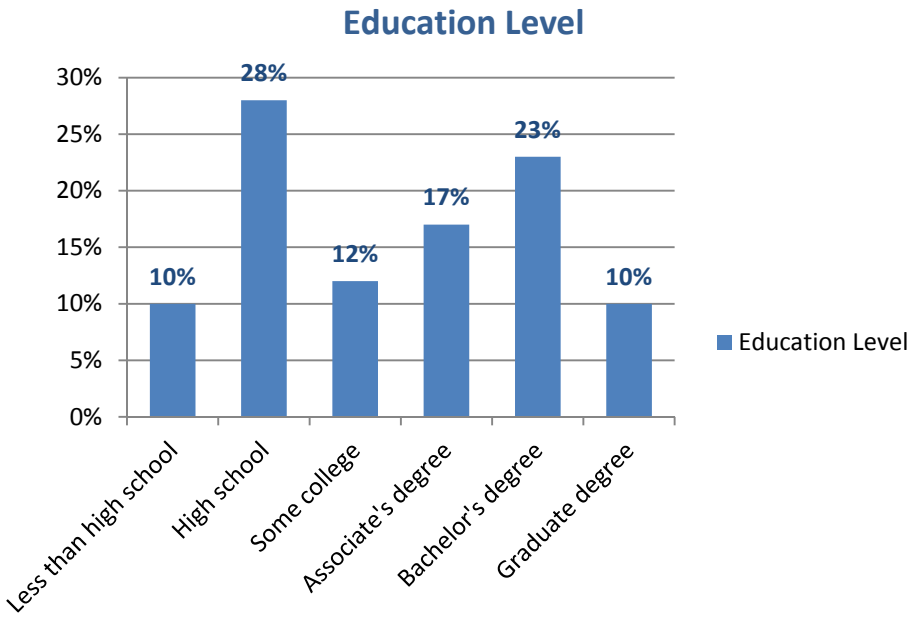
- In 2009, the unemployment rate for high school dropouts was more than twice as high as the unemployment rate for college graduates.
- In 2010, 74% of young adults (ages 25-34) with at least a bachelor's degree had full-time employment as compared to 41% of their peers who had not completed high school (IES 2011, p3).
- In November 2011, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported a 4.4% unemployment rate for those with a college degree vs. 13.2% for those with less than a high school diploma (USBLS, Table A-4).

21st Century Jobs

By 2018, 63 percent of all American job openings will require some sort of postsecondary education.[32] Figure E-9 shows the educational requirements projected for all jobs in 2018. It is estimated that employers will need nearly 22 million new workers with postsecondary degrees. If the U.S. continues at its current rate of college graduation, it will have 3 million fewer graduates than needed.

The United States once led the world in postsecondary attainment. Today that's no longer the case. While U.S. adults ages 55 to 64 are tied for first in the industrialized world in college degree attainment, a younger generation of Americans (ages 25-34) is tied for 10th. This shift began in the 1990's when the rate of college graduation in the U.S. population declined while many other nations increased. The net impact is that Canada, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, Ireland, Belgium, Norway, France and Denmark all have higher rates of post-secondary degree attainment among its young adults.[33]

FIGURE E-9: EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR JOBS IN 2018



Source: Georgetown University, Center on Education and the Workforce, 2010 p. 14
http://www9.georgetown.edu/grad/gppi/hpi/cew/pdfs/FullReport.pdf

Throwing Money at the Problem

The United States invests nearly 3% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in post-secondary education. This amounts to an average expenditure of $27,010 per college student, more than twice as much as other developed nations (Aud, 2011). Yet, the pro-rata graduation rate of U.S. students continues to decline as compared to other nations.

Access to higher education has greatly expanded in the past 40 years. In 1967 about 52 percent of U.S. high school graduates began postsecondary education immediately upon graduation from high school. By 2009, this number had climbed to 70% (IES 2011).

The Benefits of Higher Education

Financial

Based on data reported by the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, the value of a college degree can be seen in earnings potential. In 2009, the median of the earnings for young adults with the various education levels was:

- $60,000 for those with a master's degree or higher
- $45,000 for those with a bachelor's degree
- $36,000 for those with an associate's degree
- $30,000 for those with a high school diploma or its equivalent,
- $21,000 for those without a high school diploma or its equivalent

In other words, in 2009 young adults with a bachelor's degree earned more than twice as much as those without a high school diploma, 50 percent more than young adult high school graduates, and 25 percent more than young adults with an associate's degree (IES 2011).

Research by MIT Economist, David Autor, shows that this trend continues with additional education. In 2009, the median of the earnings of young adults with a master's degree or higher was $60,000, some 33 percent more than the median for young adults with a bachelor's degree. This earnings gap is increasing, rather than diminishing, over time. When held

in constant 2009 dollars, median earnings for those with a high school diploma declined from $44,000 in 1980 to $32,900 in 2009. On the other hand, earnings for those with a bachelor's degree have continued to increase. (Autor, 2010).

The lifetime wage benefits to a college graduate over a 40 year working career are estimated at more than one million dollars. This earning potential is more than 66% higher than for those who go to work immediately after receiving a high school diploma. The point at which an individual breaks even, or recoups the cost of a college education is age 33, or after 13 years of employment. This calculation includes the cost of lost wages during college study as well as the cost of borrowing the full amount of tuition and fees without financial assistance. (Baum, Ma and Payea, 2011). By 2018, 63 percent of all jobs in the United States will require at least some kind of postsecondary diploma. Most rapid employment growth will be among jobs that require, at minimum, a master's degree (U. S. Department of Labor).

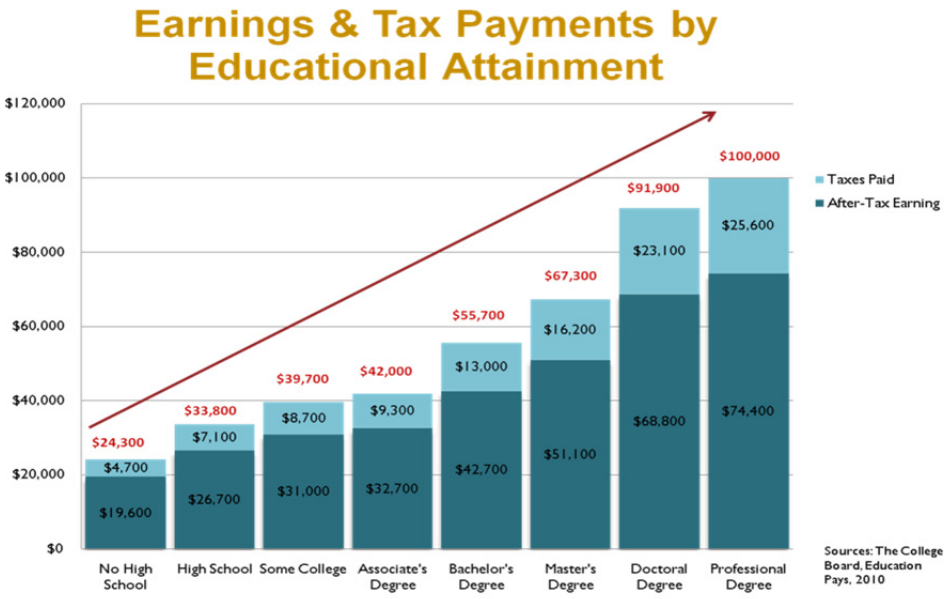
Beyond Money

The benefits of a higher education go beyond economic advantages. Individuals with a college degree are more likely to report themselves as very healthy. While the smoking rate for all Americans has declined over the last 50 years, individuals with a college degree have quit at a much faster rate. By 2008, less than 10% of college graduates reported themselves as smokers as compared to almost 30% of those with a high school degree. At every age, individuals with higher education are more likely to engage in exercise as a leisure-time activity and are less likely to be obese or have children who are obese (National Center for Health Statistics cited in Baum, Ma and Payea, 2010).

A Rising Tide – Benefits to the Community

Individuals with college degrees are less likely to need social support programs.[34] Conversely, they make higher wages and pay more income taxes at the local, state and federal level as shown in Figure E-10. The average lifetime savings in taxpayer spending on social programs for individuals with a four-year college degree range from $32,600 for white females to $108,700 for black males (Caroll and Ekut as cited by Baum, Ma and Payea, 2010).

Figure E-10



These benefits extend beyond themselves as college graduates also spend more time engaged in educational development with their children, volunteer in their community twice as often, and exercise their right to vote at a higher rate than those without a college degree (Baum, Ma and Payea, 2010).

Coaching and Persistence – A Change in Conversation

Given the compelling financial and nonfinancial arguments for having a college degree, why don't more students persist to graduation regardless of the challenges they encounter? There are no easy answers to this question. It is possible that by the time low-income students reach high school, the identity-constructing conversations that surround them are so narrow and limited that they don't see themselves as "college material." It is equally possible that the adults who co-create these conversations do not see the Students as having strengths and college aspirations. All of these beliefs exist in language. As a discursive process, coaching is ideally suited to address the processes that constrict and expand possibilities for students. Expanding choices and tapping into the Student's aspirations is a particular focus of Persistence Coaching.

Persistence Coaching is built upon a framework of social construction theory and appreciative inquiry practice. This combination addresses the needs of Students to co-create options; re-author narrative that no longer serves them; and develop a pathway to an aspirational future using the strengths, patterns of success, and resources already available to them in their lives. It does not ignore the real problems and challenges that stand in the way of college persistence – and these are many. Persistence Coaching does, however, construct a relational foundation upon which the Student, along with others in their social world, can address and navigate these issues.

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[1] There are multiple terms used when discussing higher education. In the global context the terms tertiary or university are common. In the U.S. the terms college or university are frequently used. I will use these terms interchangeably in this chapter to refer to education beyond 12th grade.

[2] As an example, Burr notes that once alcoholism was languaged as a disease rather than a lapse of personal or moral responsibility, the societal action to drunkenness shifted to offering medical and counseling treatment rather than incarceration (Burr, 2005, page 5).

[3] There is no universally agreed-upon definition for "developing" or "developed" nation. The United Nations (UN) Statistics Division states that such categorizations are primarily for statistical convenience. The UN, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund all use slightly different definitions. As of 2010, the UN has designated 63 countries categorized as "developing." In general, Japan, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Western European countries and the United States are considered developed countries. This paper will refer to

these countries as "developed" nations. Definitions for "developing" and "least developed" will be as used by the organization from whom the information is taken.

[4] Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010, UNESCO.

[5] The G.I. Bill of Rights, known formally as the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, focused on successful reintegration of World War II Veterans in to civilian life. In 1947, veterans accounted for 49 percent of college admissions. By the time the original G.I. Bill ended in 1956, nearly half of the 16 million World War II veterans had participated in an education or training program. Source: U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs website, accessed on August 1, 2011.

[6] While any person living in North, South or Central America could be called "American", in this paper the term will refer only to those living in the United States of America.

[7] A number of local school Districts have failed to meet accreditation standards since the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002. State takeover of failing school districts is one of the remedies available under NCLB.

[8] Source: http://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/MTDSG/Volume%20I/Chapter%20IV/IV-3.en.pdf Last accessed: Friday, 2 December 2011 1:48:35 PM.

[9] There is no single definition for poverty in a global context. The World Bank defines poverty as those living on $1.25 (PPP) per day. Extreme Poverty is defined as those living on less than $1.25 (PPP) per day. The OECD defines poverty as an income level that is considered minimally sufficient to sustain a family in terms of food, housing, clothing, medical needs, and so on. *Source:* Jae K. Shim, Joel G. Siegel. Dictionary of Economics. Business Dictionary Series. New York, John Wiley & Sons, 1995.

[10] Primary education usually begins at ages five, six or seven and lasts for four to six years (with the most common starting age among OECD countries being six years). *Source:* Education at a Glance, OECD, Paris, 2002, Glossary. *See also:* International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED).

[11] There is no single definition for illiteracy. The OECD borrows from the United Nations definition and defines illiteracy as the inverse of literacy: A literate person is one who can, with understanding, both read and write a short, simple statement on his or her everyday life. An illiterate person is one who cannot write such a simple statement. *Source:* Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 1, United Nations, New York, 1998, para. 2.145

Functional literacy is further defined as being able to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community's development. *Source:* Handbook of Household Surveys, Revised Edition, Studies in Methods, Series F, No. 31, United Nations, New York, 1984, para. 15.62.

[12] The UNESCO Institute for Statistics defines "adult literacy rate" as the percentage of people ages 15 and above who can, with understanding, read and write a short, simple statement on their everyday life. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines "reading literacy" as measure of a 15-year old's understanding, using, reflecting on and engaging with written texts, in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate in society (OECD 2009, p. 23).

[13] The ratio changes slightly year-to-year due to some Federal grants being awarded competitively, changes in State budgets and local tax initiatives.

[14] U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "National Public Education Financial Survey" Fiscal Year 2009, Version 1a.

[15] U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "National Public Education Financial Survey" Fiscal Year 2009, Version 1a.

[16] The Federal Poverty Level (FPL) was established in the 1950's as 3x the annual cost of a nutritionally adequate diet for a household. The measure does not consider taxes, work expenses, the cost of medical expenses, or cost of living differences in various geographic regions within the continental U.S. The National Academy of Sciences has suggested 12 alternative measures of poverty and nearly all of them are higher than the official FPL. The FPL is used to determine eligibility for certain government benefits.

[17] In 2009, the poverty line was $21,756 for a family of two adults and two children as defined by the U. S. Health and Human Services Poverty Guidelines.

[18] A high-poverty school is defined by the United States Department of Education as a public school where more than 75% of the students are eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program. This federally funded program is offered to students with a household income at or below 130% of the poverty threshold for free lunch; or between 130% and 185% of the poverty threshold for a reduced price lunch.

[19] The total net price includes the cost of tuition, fees, books, materials and living expenses.

[20] The Student Right to Know Act defines graduation rate as the percentage of full-time students who began at the same time that graduate in 150% of the expected time. For most U.S. colleges the expected time to graduation is four years. Therefore, institutions report a six-year graduation rate under this law.

[21] http://www.reed.edu/apply/tuition.html, last accessed 2/14/12. $55, 920 includes tuition, student body fee, dorm room and a meal plan. Costs for books and other associated fees were not noted.

[22] Colleges and universities in the U.S. are categorized based upon the selection criteria used to admit new students. The widely-used *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*, looks at scores on college entrance exams, student rank in his/her high school graduating class, the minimum class rank considered by the school, and minimum high school grade point average (GPA) cutoff. Barron's six ranking categories range from most competitive (highest test scores and GPA's, generally admitting less than one in three applicants) to noncompetitive (admit any student who can provide evidence of high school completion). Barron's College Rankings were used in *Diplomas and Dropouts*, Hess et al., 2009.

[23] Same as footnote #22.

[24] Same as footnote #22.

[25] The United States Government Accountability Office defines a for-profit college as a post-secondary institution that is privately owned or owned by a publicly traded company whose net earnings can benefit a shareholder or individual.

[26] Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 funds federal financial aid programs for students. The two primary aid tools are Pell Grants for low-income students, which do not have to be repaid; and, Stafford loans, which are repayable by the student.

[27] Data as of 2009 for full-time students shows that 38% of older students, those aged 35 and over, attended private for-profit institutions as compared to only 5% of students under the age of 25; the ratio of male to female students at for-profit institutions was 37:63 as compared to 46:54 at public and 43:57 at private non-profit institutions; 13 % of Black students choose four-year for-profit institutions, a rate almost double any other race. The rate climbs to 17% when you include both 4-year and 2-year for-profit institutions (calculated from data contained in IES 2011, Table A-39-1, p272).

[28] On August 4, 2010, the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) testified before the Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) of the U.S. Senate on its findings of an undercover investigation conducted in 2009. The topic of the testimony was the GAO's findings of fraud and deceptive marketing practices in some For-Profit Colleges examined. The HELP Committee, Chaired by Senator Tom Harkin, conducted its own analysis of records and published reports in June and September 2010.

[29] Most for-profit colleges are accredited nationally. Public and non-profit colleges are accredited regionally. Regional accreditation is considered to be a more stringent process and a higher standard.

[30] This figure is based on the cost of tuition, room and board for a full-time undergraduate student in a public institution. Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2011). Digest of Education Statistics, 2010 (NCES 2011-015), Chapter 3.

[31] This includes the same costs as described in the previous footnote. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2011.

[32] Georgetown University, Center on Education and the Workforce, 2010 p. 14

http://www9.georgetown.edu/grad/gppi/hpi/cew/pdfs/FullReport.pdf

[33] OECD Education at a Glance 2011. Table A1.3a Population with tertiary education (2009)

[34] Social programs include such things as food stamps, Medicaid, housing subsidies, Supplemental Security Income, Medicare, unemployment insurance, Social Security and state and local incarceration costs. Specific benefits tend to be used disproportionately by different groups.

PERSISTENCE

PERSISTENCE

PLACING STUDENTS AT THE CENTER

My choice of the term persistence is intentional. The more typical higher education terms such as retention, dropout, attrition and departure place the ***institution*** at the center of the conversation and thereby measure the students who "leave" it on an aggregate and impersonal level. Success is gauged by change in the percent of students who choose to stay at the institution, or in a particular program, year over year (Comings et al. 1999; Tinto, 2012). These terms (and the studies using them) also focus primarily on the "leaving" rather than the "staying."

By contrast, I use the term *persistence*[1] to focus exclusively on the success of the Student regardless of institutional affiliation and over the span of the individual's lifetime. I believe that this distinction is quite important when evaluating the potential value of Persistence Coaching.

STUDENT DEPARTURE AND RETENTION

Student departure, and its complement student retention, have been studied and discussed in the literature since at least the mid-1960's. Attrition statistics are often viewed as outcome measures of institutional effectiveness (Galligani et al., 1994).

Drawing again from Galligani et al., when considering student retention, there are many different things that can be measured:

- Graduation rate
  - in a designated period of time
  - from the institution where initially enrolled
  - from the program or major initially declared
- Type of withdrawal
  - Voluntary *(the student's decision)*
  - Involuntary *(the institution's decision)*
- Timing of withdrawal
  - During the application process
  - Transition (end of first semester)

- End of the first year of college

Retaining students is necessary for an institution to fulfill its mission – and to remain a going concern. From an institution's perspective, all withdrawals can be viewed as negative. Particularly bothersome are voluntary withdrawals by students whose grades indicate that they are academically successful. The student, however, may see the same event quite differently. Timmons (1978) found that a student who makes the choice to withdraw may do so as a way to establish independence from parents, reflect on personal priorities and formulate a new identity. Haagen (1977) recognized voluntary departure to "think things through" as a form of mature decision making.

Stop Out vs. Drop Out

Many students will do as I did – stop attending college temporarily only to return and finish at a later date.[2] Tinto (2012) refers to this as a "stop out." He makes the case that from a research point of view, it is difficult to know when an individual moves from stop out to dropout. For this reason, Persistence Coaching is focused on the individual and may be engaged at any point in the student's academic journey.

When a student returns to college, the institution may view him or her as a dropout who has returned. The student, however, likely sees him- or herself as a persistent learner who simply could not attend courses for a while (Comings et al., 1999). That is certainly how I saw myself after my three-year stop-out. The University characterized me as a "non-traditional returning student" but I saw myself as a learner who had continued to attend night classes and non-credit courses throughout my three year hiatus.

Literature on Persistence

As a way to learn I turned to the published literature on student attrition and persistence, but to be more inclusive I broadened the search terms to include: academic success, student departure and dropout. I found two literature reviews particularly useful:

- Undergraduate Persistence and Graduation at the University of California: A Literature Review on Undergraduate Persistence (Galligani et al., 1994)

- Mentoring and Undergraduate Academic Success: A Literature Review (Jacobi, 1991)

Using these literature reviews and additional searches I found a significant volume of academic research on attrition and institutional retention programs.[3] Much of this work focused on institutional policy and programs or evaluated programmatic effects on sub-populations of students.[4] Most of the research I found focused on links to departure or withdrawal (i.e. they did not study what kept students enrolled) and were written from a positivistic perspective that attributed departure to some individual characteristic of the student (Galligani et al., 1994).

Even in those cases where the term "persistence" was used it did not meet my student-centered definition. My use of "persistence" aligns closely, however, with that used by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL)[5] and Comings et al. (1999)

"Students who persist in learning inside and outside of a program until they have achieved their goals."

The NCSALL definition encompasses a long-term view of formal and informal learning; and it links education to the attainment of personal goals. It also recognizes that for some students, education will not be a linear or contiguous experience. The NCSALL definition is problematic in that it draws from work with adult basic education students, those who have not completed high school, speak English as a second language, etc. To date, the research on "traditional" undergraduate students and adult basic education students are two parallel lines of research with little or no intersection. While there are differences between the students in these groups, two things connect them for me. First, education for these individuals is no longer compulsory but is a choice. Second, Students must balance the desire to attend college with the other demands of adult life.

These demands are wide-ranging and include things such as the need to earn an income and care for family members.

I find it interesting that in contemporary American society we do not consider 18-year-old students to be "full adults" and much attention is focused in the education literature on the personal, moral, social and psychological development of the student in college (Chickering and Reisser, 1993; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2008; Evans et al., 2010). Throughout much of history a person of this age would have been a full member of society with all of the rights and responsibilities that accompany this status. Through our language and social practices we create college-aged students as a child-adult hybrid and we (the adults who have the power over them) expect them to think, act, and behave in particular ways. And we have dissimilar expectations of those child-adult students from social groupings different than the dominant culture.

A Relational View of Persisting

> *" ...without assistance many* [new students] *are unable to establish competent intellectual and social membership in the communities of the college. Many eventually leave.*
>
> Vincent Tinto (Stages of Student Departure, 1988)

Existing models of student persistence see the student's decision to depart or persist in college as a complex set of factors and interactions (Bean, 1980; Tinto, 1988; Tinto, 1987; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). Perhaps the most widely cited theory regarding student persistence is Vincent Tinto's Student Integration Model (Galligani et al., 1994). Tinto's integration model, based on Durkheim's Theory of Suicide (Tinto, 1987; Tinto, 1988), sees student persistence as a function of academic ability, motivation and the institution's social characteristics. While equating departing college with suicide seems extreme, what links the two is the decision and subsequent action to leave a social system.

Tinto believes that the most important factor in a student's decision to persist is the extent to which the student integrates him-or herself into the

academic and social domains of college life. The more integrated – the more likely to persist. Tinto later enhanced his model to include the student's ability to navigate certain rites of passage (Tinto, 1998; Tinto, 2012).

Rites of Passage

Building on the work of social anthropologist, Arnold Van Gennep (1960), Vincent Tinto makes the case that there is also a chronological quality to a Student's decision to stay or withdraw from college. That is, the reasons for departure or persistence change over time. Tinto refers to three stages (Tinto, 1988), all connected to social practices:

1. **Separation.** A student must disassociate him- or herself from the social practices and norms best known to him or her - family, friends and high school. In cases where college is not valued, there may be limited support for separation or it may be opposed. Tinto describes the "disorienting" process of separation as Students seek to disassociate themselves from one set of social practices so that they may integrate as a social member of the college community.

   I recall this feeling of disorientation the first few weeks of college and still find being a "stranger" in a new community to be unsettling. Some research suggests that the first six weeks of the first semester are critical to college persistence (Cope and Hannah; Daubman et al.; Louis and Potter; as discussed in Tinto, 1988).

   Persistence Coaching is designed so that it can begin at a point of most use to the Student. For first-time college students, the point of first contact will generally be before classes begin. For Students re-engaging in college coursework, the first contact could be early in the semester. In all cases, Persistence Coaching is designed to include peer-learning groups as a point of social connection, support and learning.

2. **Transition**. From the perspective of college, Tinto describes a sort of "limbo" between community associations of the past and "hoped

for" communities of the present. I recognize this feeling of being adrift without a place to anchor when I first arrived at college. There seemed so much to learn in order to fit in: new vocabularies and ways of dressing, unfamiliar customs and habits, unspoken codes of conduct and relationships that seem impenetrable to me.

By my second attempt at college I had experience in negotiating passage between different social groups through various job assignments and my classes in night school. I had developed a set of resources that worked for me and I continue to call upon them during transitional moments. I've learned to accept the initial discomfort, to reassure myself that these feelings will pass as I learn new ways of interacting and adapting. Many college students do the same. Some, however, do not have the relational resources to persist past this moment of isolation. Persistence Coaching includes practices that help to identify and build confidence in a Student's ability to make successful transitions.

While Tinto hints at the relational processes that serve to advance or retard the Student's transition, he speaks of it from an individualistic view. That is, it is the Student who lacks "coping skills, educational goals and commitments, or who has not learned to direct their energies to solve the problems they face (Tinto, 1988)." Instead of locating the issue within the individual Student, I look instead to the relational processes in the sending (home community) and receiving (college community) for practices that serve to keep a Student stuck in limbo or help them move to integration.

Tinto does, however, note that students from minority, poor, and very rural communities are more likely to come from "norms and patterns of behavior" that are quite different from those they will encounter at college (Tinto, 1988). I understand this to mean that Students who are born into college-educated or wealthy families are more likely to establish relational and behavioral resources that come through their life experiences. These include exposure to a multiplicity of cultures, norms and practices through family

conversation, foreign travel, social interactions, dining out, theater attendance, and residential summer camps. With support from family and other interested adults these Students will have developed practices that allow them to adapt and integrate more readily in new social circumstances. My family did not eat out in fine restaurants, go to the theater or take vacations outside of our geographic area. I did not meet a person of color or an individual who spoke English as a second language until I was in college. College for me, and others who come from low-income or rural families, is a different world. Working through the "culture shock" and finding people whose values, norms and habits are "like me" is the work of the transition stage described by Tinto. While Persistence Coaching cannot do the work of transition, it can help to illuminate what is happening and help Students create strategies to find their niche in the college community.

3. **Incorporation.** According to Tinto, the final stage is incorporation or integration into the college community. Again drawing from Van Gennep's work, Tinto notes that Students are often not provided with the formal rituals and ceremonies that foster integration. He states that even college orientation programs, becoming more common at colleges and universities, do not provide the extended contact needed to form community membership.

   When I went to college I was not offered an orientation. Rather, Students were thrown into the pool of college to either sink or swim. Tinto notes that student associations, such as fraternities and sororities, may serve to incorporate students into college life. Had I understood participation in a fraternal or social organization as helpful to college assimilation, I might have made different choices. I chose to avoid sorority "rush week" activities viewing them as extensions of high school cliques, which I found to be objectionable. Tinto might say that I made this decision because I viewed the sorority's values and behaviors as discordant to my own (Tinto, 1988). It is impossible to know if joining a sorority would have kept me in college in the first go-round, but it is an interesting question to ponder.

> Persistence Coaching can be a source of information, support and social connectedness. Through the peer-learning groups and contact with the Coach, Students can make decisions and choices that will help to accelerate incorporation into one or more groups within the college community.

Navigating the Stages

Persistence Coaching is designed as one process to help Students navigate through the stages described by Tinto. It also incorporates many of the supports found to increase college persistence among adult basic education learners (Comings et al., 1999). It does so through goal establishment, identification of the positive and negative forces that Students will encounter along the way, development of strategies to manage these forces, and building the self-confidence necessary to overcome obstacles and leverage opportunities in pursuit of these goals.

One of the hallmarks of coaching is the creation of compelling goals and commitment of these goals to writing. In the vernacular of appreciative inquiry and Persistence Coaching, this would call for the Student to envision a compelling future (anticipatory principle). NCSALL's research found that a clear and specific goal lead to increased persistence in its adult learners (Comings et al., 1999). Persistence Coaching provides a number of activities designed to explore a Student's goals for college and for life. These long-term goals may include working in a specific profession (medicine, law, business or education) or a financial outcome (financial stability for family, purchasing a house, etc.). These long-term goals, along with sub-goals necessary to achieve them, are written into the Student's goal plan. Progress toward the goals will be tracked and sub-goals modified as needed.

NCSALL developed a framework for analyzing the data gathered from their Students. It sought to place the Student in the central position and provide practical advice to those individuals (Program Managers for NCSALL) who wanted to increase persistence. Goals very much aligned with that of Persistence Coaching. NCSALL chose to use force-field analysis drawn from the work of sociologist, Kurt Lewin (1999). Identifying those forces that support or inhibit action along a particular path can help a Student

understand what is necessary to move in a desired direction, in this case achievement of an educational goal (Lewin as discussed in Comings et al., 1999). In Persistence Coaching, each Student's goal plan includes an analysis of obstacles and challenges (inhibiting forces) as well as strengths and aspirations (supporting forces). Developing strategies to use supporting forces as a way to mitigate inhibiting forces are central to persistence coaching conversations (positive principle).

Lastly, Students must believe that the goals they have set are within their power to achieve. Bandura calls this self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986); Cooperrider referred to it as a self-fulfilling prophecy (Cooperrider, 1987); others may refer to it as self-belief or self-confidence. Within Persistence Coaching we work to uncover "what already is" through a discovery process focused on high-point moments of past achievement. Moving these moments into a plan for the future both energizes and focuses.

More detail about Persistence Coaching as well as a discussion about the role of mentoring, often used synonymously with coaching, in higher education are included in the Coaching Chapter.

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[1] Tinto discusses this distinction in Appendix A of his book Completing College: Rethinking Institutional Action. As I reviewed the research literature, however, I found that many writers use the term *persistence* as synonymous with *retention*. This differs from my definition, which uses *persistence* exclusively to refer to the Student, not the institution. Obviously this definition misses many students who persist outside of these narrow parameters.

[2] This difficulty in measurement is one of the reasons that the U.S. Department of Education has set specific parameters for its research on student attrition and persistence. The DOE's statistics only include first-time, full-time students who enrolled and went on to earn either a four-year degree within six years or a two-year degree within three years at the same institution where first enrolled.

[3] Several publications were not available for review due to the fact that the ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) databases had removed access due to the discovery that some publications contained personally identifiable information such as social security numbers. In cases where the abstract looked sufficiently applicable, I tried to find other sources for the research. I was successful in some, but not all, cases.

[4] For instance, a number of studies find that students who attend classes part-time, are commuters, or are an ethnic minority other than Asian, etc. are statistically more likely to withdraw. Most of these studies are predictive rather than descriptive in that they do not seek underlying reasons for the withdrawal. And they do not study the students who fit the stated profile but who have been successful students.

[5] U. S. Government funding for NCSALL ended on March 31, 1997. World Education maintains the NCSALL website and NCSALL's research and publications.

COACHING

COACHING

COACHING CONVERSATIONS IN EVERYDAY EXCHANGES

If the chapter on education forms the body (context) of my research project then this chapter, on coaching, forms its heart and soul.

> *"How might coaching, a relatively new discursive process, be used to increase the number of low-income students who graduate with a college degree in the United States of America? "*

I've been a practicing executive coach for more than a decade. But I have engaged in coaching conversations for as long as I can remember. If we use the simplest of definitions for coaching as "*a collaborative, possibility-focused process"* it is easy to see that coaching conversations can, and do, occur in common everyday exchanges between people of all sorts: fathers and daughters, teachers and students, nurses and patients, and customers waiting in the supermarket checkout line. For me, coaching is a particular way of listening, asking questions and being connected to my conversational partner – if only for the ten minutes shared in the checkout line. Coaching as a socially-engaged, relational process can be practiced by anyone. It does not require highly specialized training, certification or a title. This is the premise upon which Persistence Coaching is built. Anyone in a Student's social world can, and perhaps already does, act as a coach. What I'm hoping to add in this dissertation is a set of practices that focus coaching conversations on college persistence.

This chapter will give you an overview of coaching as an emerging profession, discuss the available literature on coaching, and review some coaching frameworks. Most importantly, it will position coaching as a relational process. It will frame social construction as the foundation for my coaching and introduce Persistence Coaching as a practice available to anyone with an interest in supporting a Student's persistence goals.

MAPPING THE FIELD - WHAT IS COACHING?

Coaching is a relatively new discursive process focused on supporting intentional change and goal achievement, as identified by the coaching

client. It is a multi-disciplinary approach which draws theory, models and practice from diverse fields such as athletics, cultural anthropology, psychology, sociology, philosophy, systems theory, human resources management and adult learning (Grant 2003; Stein, 2004; Rock and Page 2009).

Coaches, and the organizations to which they belong, continue to evolve a definition for coaching. A comparison of definitions used by different organizations involved in the field of coaching[1] revealed seven different definitions.

The number of people who identify themselves as coaches is significant and growing. As of 2011, the International Coach Federation (ICF), a global professional association for coaches, had 19,000 paid members located in more than 100 countries.[2] The 2012 ICF Global Coaching Study conducted by consulting firm, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), estimated that there were 47,500 professional coaches working around the world generating close to $2 billion USD in annual revenue (International Coach Federation, 2012).

Body of Research

As of 2011, at least three comprehensive reviews have been conducted to survey the literature on executive and life coaching. The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) published "Executive Coaching: An annotated bibliography" in 2000.[3] The CCL document includes 49 publications authored, or co-authored, by 68 individuals (Douglas and Morley, 2000).

In 2006, Sandy Maynard published "Personal and Professional Coaching: A Literature Review"[4] as partial requirement for her Master's Thesis in Psychology at Walden University. Maynard's focus was on coaching methods and models.

Anthony Grant included an overview of the published literature as part of his 2001 doctoral dissertation. Grant published *Workplace, Executive and Life Coaching: An Annotated Bibliography from the Behavioural Science and Business Literature* in May 2009. His focus was exclusive on scholarly

publications.[5] Grant's review of the literature shows clearly the growth of interest in coaching as expressed through research and scholarly writing.

Further evidence of the importance of coaching is the development of coaching-specific journals. All developed within the last decade, the following journals are peer-reviewed publications focused exclusively on the practice of coaching:

Journal Name	Publisher	Year Founded
Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice	Association for Coaching	2008
International Coaching Psychology Review	British Psychological Society	2006
The Coaching Psychologist	British Psychological Society	2005
International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching	European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC)	2003
International Journal of Evidence-Based Coaching and Mentoring	Oxford Brookes University Business School	2003
International Journal of Coaching in Organizations	Privately owned, John Lazar	2003

The Broad Appeal of Coaching

The process of coaching can, and is, applied in many different domains. It is impossible to read a newspaper, magazine or e-journal without coming across the term "coach" used with a wide range of modifiers. There are diet coaches, finance coaches, life coaches, exercise coaches, business coaches, learning coaches, wellness coaches, career coaches…….the list seems to go on indefinitely.

Special Interest Groups

The International Coach Federation recognizes that it is not only the buyers of coaching services who have preferences. Coaches, themselves, have a range of specialty interests and areas in which they prefer to work. To accommodate these specializations, more than 30 Special Interest Groups (SIGs) have been created to hold monthly virtual meetings.[6] Some of these groups are organized around the type of client served; others around the area of coaching focus; yet others are linked by a particular approach or coaching model. A sample of these specialty coaching groups are:

AD/HD Community of Practice	Nonprofit Community of Practice
Brain-based Coaching	Physical Disability & Chronic Illness
Career Coaching Community of Practice	Relationship Coaching
Coaching and Psychotherapy	Research Forum
Internal Coaching Community	Self-care for Coach and Client
Japanese Speaking Coaches	Teen/Adolescent

Coaching Frameworks and Foundation

Coaching practice is drawn from many foundations, including the various branches of psychology. Numerous articles and books have been written about coaching through the lens of psychology, and many coaching models have tendrils leading there, even if practitioners do not fully understand the origins. The art of questioning, sustained listening skills, the ability to reframe issues, conducting assessments and guided reflection owe thanks to psychology and related practice areas. The coaching field is rich with conversation among practitioners from the various models: Psychodynamic, Humanistic Person-Centered, Gestalt, Behaviorist and Cognitive (Wildflower and Brennan, 2011; Stober and Grant, 2006; Peltier, 2001). None of these, however, fully defines or can contain coaching. Further, these forms of practice are grounded in a paradigm that views coaching from an individualist, rather than social, perspective. I will discuss this in more detail later in the chapter.

The Dodo Bird Effect – No One Right Way

Research on the effectiveness of psychotherapy generally finds that no one type is better than another for a given problem. This is sometimes called the "dodo bird" effect.[7] Namely, all forms of psychotherapy do about equally well (Seligman, 1995; Luborsky, Singer, & Luborsky, 1975). We should expect nothing more for coaching models. In his 2005 article, "*Executive Coaching: The road to Dodoville needs paving with more than good assumptions,*" Rodney Lowman reviewed the special issue on executive coaching published by the Consulting Psychology Journal. Lowman provided a synopsis of themes found in the collection of case studies and observed that the model of coaching used (in this case all were based on a branch of psychology) "matter less than the firmness of the conviction held by the coach as to the efficacy of the model" (Lowman, 2005). In other words, "*If I believe it, I make it true*". As a social constructionist I might phrase this a little differently, "*If we believe it, we make it true.*"

While the Field Waits …. Some Distinguishing Characteristics

It may be useful to identify some of the distinguishing characteristics of coaching and coaching relationships. These are not exhaustive and should be considered a "convenience sample" based on my experiences over the last ten years.

Unlike the power imbalance that is endemic to many helping professions derived from the medical model, coaching is an egalitarian relationship (Peltier, 2001; Grant, 2003). The coach has expert knowledge, but so does the coaching client. Neither is superior to the other.

While the focus of therapy and counseling is often on past events and healing, coaching is decidedly focused on the present and an aspirational future. History may be interesting or useful as background, but it is not the core (Peltier, 2001; Stober, 2006). When parts of the past are carried forward, only the "best" are selected (Binkert and Clancy, 2011).

Coaching is focused on solutions and aspirations rather than problem analysis. Coaching seeks forward movement toward a client-defined goal rather than "staying stuck" in the problem or its analysis. In this way it differs from both therapy and consulting, where problem analysis is a component part of the process (Peltier, 2001; Stober, 2006).

Coaching is a systemic discursive approach focused on creating something new, an aspiration. My clients frequently think of this "something new" as a desired change or a goal. Creation of new knowledge and new practices within coaching is no accident or by-product; it is the focus of the coaching process. Like jazz and other forms of improvisation there are many styles and approaches to coaching, but it is not a free-for-all. Coaching, like improvisation, has rhythms, boundaries and expectations. In my own practice, I have found a number of themes that guide each engagement:

- Relationships are based on trust and mutuality
- The aspiration (goal) energizes the process
- The clearer the aspiration, the higher the energy

- Relational responsibility includes conversations about process, boundaries and direction
- There are moments of "lightness" and moments of "darkness" – both are valuable
- There comes a time for ending. Or movement to a new conversation.

Mentoring vs. Coaching – A Rose by Another Name?

I did not find any published research that linked the concept of persistence and coaching in the way that I have offered it here.[8] And there is very little published academic literature about the use of coaching in college, other than its use on the athletic field.

There is, however, a significant and growing body of literature on the concept of mentoring and academic success in college (Jacobi, 1991; Evans et al. 2010). As of June 2012, there were more than 500 articles using the terms "mentor" or "mentoring" in connection with post-secondary education on the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) database. Many of these articles focused mentoring new teachers as way of retaining them in the field. Others discussed the role of teachers and advisors in mentoring graduate students (Jacobi, 1991).

Some writers seem to use the terms *mentor* and *coach* interchangeably. A study published by Stanford University in March 2011 (and reviewed by the U. S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences in August 2012) illustrates this issue. The study's title is "The Effects of Student Coaching in College: An Evaluation of a Randomized Experiment in Student Mentoring" (Bettinger and Baker, 2011).

Like coaching, the term mentoring does not have an agreed-upon or consistent definition. In a review of the literature on mentoring and undergraduate academic success, Jacobi (1991) cites more than 15 different definitions for mentoring drawn from psychology, management and education. Using Jacobi's review of the mentoring literature, there is also wide variation in the characteristics of the mentoring relationship. For instance:

- Some articles describe an age gap, with the mentor typically much older than the student being mentored. Others either do not specify an age or suggest that peers make suitable mentors.
- Some articles describe a mentoring relationship that lasts for multiple years. Others describe it as a single episode.
- Some articles describe the need for "relationship intensity" and others do not address this aspect at all.
- Some articles speak to the need to "match" the mentor and student as part of a formal process. Others look at mentoring that occurs as part of a natural or unstructured process.

Again drawing from Jacobi's review of the undergraduate mentoring literature, there are four factors which seem to provide common ground for both mentoring and persistence coaching as I propose it. They may both be viewed as:

1. A helping relationship typically focused on achievement of both short- and long-term goals.
2. Comprehensive enough to encompass a variety of components such as emotional and social support, career and professional development and role modeling.
3. A reciprocal and generative relationship.
4. Personal and relational (i.e. not a role model drawn from history or a person known only through the media).

There are, however, two factors offered by Jacobi that I believe differ between the mentoring literature and what I propose in persistence coaching.

1. Mentors are not paid. A persistence coach may, or may not, be paid.
2. Relative to their protégés (students in this case), mentors are more experienced, have more influence and greater levels of achievement within a particular organization or environment. In persistence coaching all parties are recognized as being expert in some areas, non-expert in others; neither is considered superior or as having more power in the relationship.

Additionally, all of the studies which I read and those included in Jacobi's literature review are positioned from the perspective of the institution. That is they account for students who persist or leave it. By contrast, persistence coaching tracks with the student.

Coaching as a Marketing and Retention Tool

There is at least one for-profit company, called Inside Track®, that provides coaching services to increase persistence for traditional undergraduate and adult students. Inside Track's business model is to work directly with Universities who determine which students are offered the coaching services. The company does not offer coaching services to individual students and their coaching methodology is proprietary. The company's website[9] states that it has coached more than 250,000 students on more than 50 campuses across the U.S. A brochure downloaded from the website provides the following program outcomes:

- 10% - 15% increase in enrollment rates
- Faster response times for inquires, applicants
- Higher retention rates for enrolled students
- Actionable insights that improve the admissions process and student experience

Inside Track data was the source of analysis used by Stanford University in a study published in March 2011 (Bettinger, 2011).

Given the popularity of coaching as described earlier in this chapter, it is clear that we should expect persistence initiatives using elements of coaching to increase over time.

Two Coaching Paradigms – A Comparison

When I started my own coaching and consulting practice in 2000, I wanted to better understand some of the transformations I had witnessed in my role as a corporate human resources manager. I looked for academic courses in coaching but found none in the U.S. I spoke with several private coaching schools, but none would reveal the philosophy or methodology from which it taught. Rather than selecting one school with one set of

proprietary coaching practices, I decided to create my own learning plan. I wanted to canvass the field and select what I felt were the best philosophies, approaches and tools.

To this end, I engaged a series of coaches to work with me so that I could experience different styles and approaches. I began to read books on coaching practices and methodology. Most importantly, I learned from my coaching clients as part of a reflective practice, which I continue today.

The Individualist Frame

With apologies to my earliest clients, my first coaching practice was based on the GROW[10] model taken from what I learned from the coaches I had hired and from my reading. It was a simple, linear, step-by-step process, focused on goal achievement. Like many coaching paradigms, it was embedded in an individualist framework. My coaching client and I were two individuals with clear and separate roles.

I believed that my role as coach was to engage in a fact-finding mission to better understand my client and learn ways to keep the client focused on his or her goals. My client's role was to set a clear goal and work towards achieving it. Other people in the client's life didn't have a role in the coaching process other than to provide "expert" data on progress. I viewed "change" as a measurable outcome, caused by the individual and under his or her control. I believed that through assessments and inventories; interviews with bosses, co-workers and subordinates; and, a review of documents (goals, organization charts and performance reviews) I could accurately determine and "name" the person's strengths and weaknesses. This data, coupled with a specific goal, facilitated the creation of an action plan.

Whether or not my coaching client was aware of it, this goal was often predetermined by his or her manager based on some "deficit" or short-coming (pre-coaching needs analysis). I was told that the person was too aggressive; or, not aggressive enough; they had been promoted into senior management but did not delegate effectively; they had poor communication skills; did not get along with others, etc. Each of these

"problems" was deemed to reside inside the individual for whom coaching was sought. I, as coach, was responsible to make the individual understand their deficits and create a plan for improvement. The improvement was to be measured, primarily, by the boss and other people who "observed" the individual.

I worked hard to establish trust and credibility in my coaching relationships. I was particularly mindful of my communication style but this, too, was built on an individualistic view. The best description of my communication philosophy at this time is the "transmission" model (Pearce, 2007). If there was misunderstanding, then the fault was either in the sender (I did not make myself clear) or the receiver (he or she just wasn't listening carefully).

By this time I had been an appreciative inquiry practitioner for more than five years and had fully embraced AI's premise of wholeness and strength (Cooperrider, 2005; Hammond, 1998). I very quickly found the GROW model to be constraining and not aligned with my work using AI. My coaching partners (clients) also seemed to push against the narrow confines of these coaching conversations. I sensed that they wanted a deeper connection and the freedom to explore beyond the boundaries of job and organization.

The Relational Frame

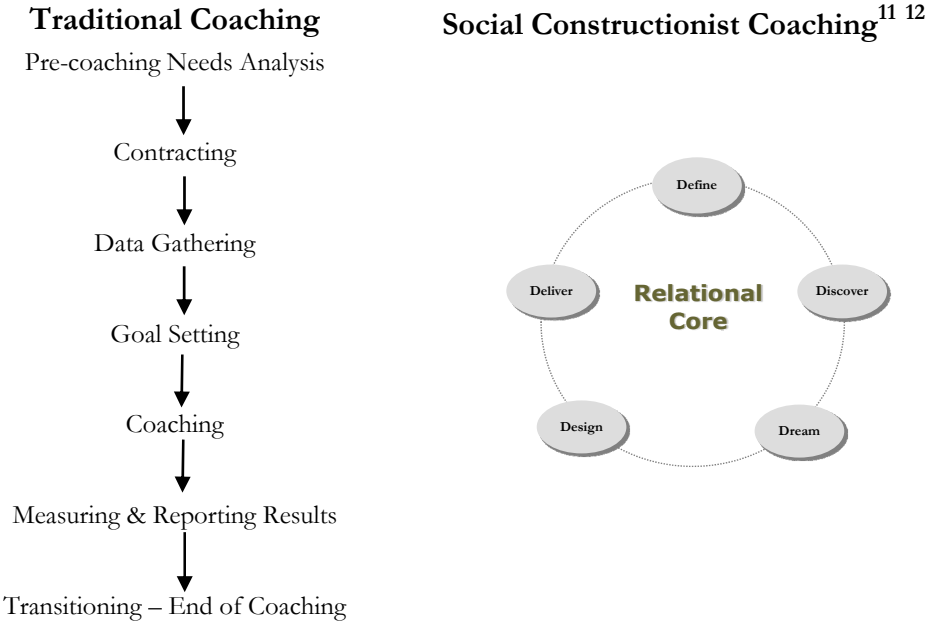
A fundamental shift for me was the realization that the person with whom I was in conversation was my *partner* not my client. This shift in how I located myself within the relationship had two important impacts. It neutralized the power differential – I was no longer the expert hired to fix someone. Secondly, it embraced the place of "not knowing". If coaching was a journey taken together, then we traveled side-by-side. And, like a mountain hike, the route would not always be straight and the end point would not always be in view.

I started to pay close attention to moments with my coaching-partner when transactional conversation ceased and we moved into dialogue. I could sense the change in energy when we talked about strengths and how

these related to personal aspirations both inside and outside of the company.

Within a year, my coaching process had developed in to a recursive, circular model built on social construction and appreciative inquiry foundations. Figure C-1 is a side-by-side comparison of these two paradigms. I've labeled the left graphic *Traditional Coaching* and it depicts the activity-oriented process I described above. I've labeled the right graphic *Social Constructionist Coaching*. This is the paradigm and process that I've used with my coaching clients for many years and its essence forms the Persistence Coaching process I am using in my research project. At the center of social construction coaching is the relational core.

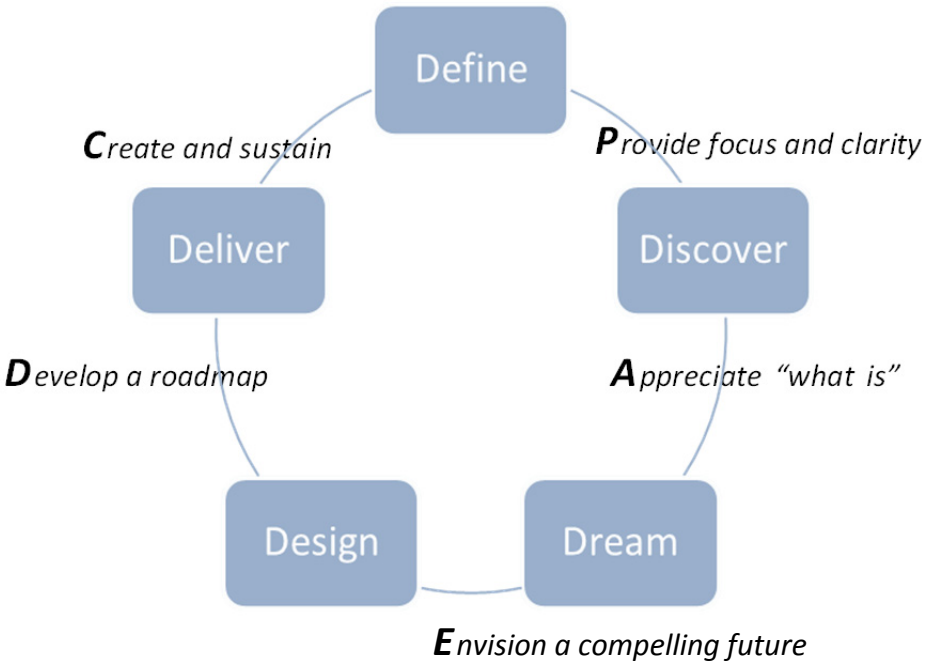
FIGURE C-1
COMPARISON OF TWO COACHING PARADIGMS



There are fundamental differences between traditional coaching and social constructionist coaching. I believe that these are best understood through an example. To do this, I'd like to introduce some of the Persistence

Coaching practices to you. Persistence Coaching is built on the coaching practices that I have been using for almost a decade. Figure C-2 shows the elements of Persistence Coaching.[13]

FIGURE C-2
PERSISTENCE COACHING



The purpose of Define is to provide focus and clarity for the coaching relationship. This is often the natural entry point for a coaching relationship. A Student must want Persistence Coaching and they must want to engage me (or another stakeholder) in a coaching conversation.

A number of practical matters will be decided within the Define phase. How long will the coaching last? How often will the conversations take place? When and where? Issues of confidentiality will be discussed and agreed. We will take time to get to know one another by sharing some basic personal information. The first conversation will always include a set of questions:

1. What are your greatest strengths?
2. What are you really, really good at?
3. What are your proudest accomplishments?
4. I'm going to waive a magic wand… I want you to imagine that it is five years from now and you have accomplished everything you set out to do….we are meeting for a celebration lunch. Describe to me (speaking in present tense) what is happening in your life.

Why ask these questions at the first meeting? Because in this simple conversation, I invoke the power of appreciative inquiry:

- Our questions focus our attention and subsequent actions
- Change begins the moment we ask the first question

Simultaneity Principle

- The focus is on what is wanted vs. not wanted
- What we choose to focus on, grows

Poetic Principle

- Positive language creates positive futures
- We must believe something, before we can see it

Anticipatory Principle

- Identity is shaped in relationship with others
- We are influenced by (and influence) others

Constructionist Principle

- The positive core is revealed
- Strengths can be leveraged

Positive Principle

Because relationship sits at the center of Persistence Coaching, both the Student and I must agree that there is positive regard and a desire to move

forward together. If the Student, or I, feels that this is not a good match, then we each must be free to seek another partner.

The purpose of the Discover phase is to appreciate "what is" – the strengths and resources already available to the Student. Some of these practices may seem familiar from traditional coaching; however, the purpose for them here is quite different. For instance,

- Interviews with stakeholders who know the Student well. I use a version of the questions outlined above. I want to gather strengths information but I also want to engage the stakeholder as a participant in the coaching process. Stakeholders might include high school teachers, coaches, parents, youth ministers, or other recommended by the Student.
- Assessments and inventories. I no longer consider these as data points or a way to label the person (introvert, extrovert, dominant, etc.). Instead, these become *conversation starters*. *"If this report says that you are an extrovert, in what ways does that help you? Are there some situations when you are not an extrovert? What would happen if you acted "as if" you were an introvert? What would that look like? In what ways could you use performing introversion to your advantage?"*
- Strengths. I use a number of methodologies to create a personal strengths inventory. These include self-report inventories, appreciative interviews, values exploration and a life map.

Rather than complete all of these things at one time at the beginning of the coaching engagement as a way to *describe and prescribe*, I prefer to think of these practices as multiple conversations that will emerge over time.

The purpose of the Dream phase is to envision a compelling future. There a number of practices that I have developed to help people "dream big" without feeling self-conscious or limited by the constraints set by others. Examples of these are:

- Write a short essay called "My Perfect Day" which describes in detail what you will do from the time you get up in the morning until you go to bed at night. Follow-on writings can be extended beyond the day to "My Perfect Life."
- Create a collage of pictures and words that represent the life you want to live. The collage can be created from magazine pictures and words, clip art, personal photos, or drawings.
- Maintain a gratitude journal for one month. At the end of the month, write a short reflection about the things that you most value.

The purpose of the Design phase is to develop a roadmap. Because the goal of college graduation is very big and very far away, it will be important that Students set intermediate goals that both support graduation and are satisfying in, and of, themselves. Examples might be to attain an 'A' in a challenging class, earn a specific GPA for the semester, or improve academic writing skills.

Each Student will develop a written goal plan which can be printed or maintained in a phone or computer file. The plan will include the following elements:

- The Goal (written as concretely as possible)
- The payoff – the ways in which the goal contributes to values and objectives
- Tasks that move toward my goal (these are tactical and short term)

- Potential barriers I might face
- Ways I will address these barriers
- Key strengths I can capitalize on to achieve my goals and/or overcome barriers
- Key relationships that I can call upon as a resource
- How I plan to monitor progress toward my goal

Concepts such as goals and achievement are viewed by social construction as discursive choices rather than "things that exist." Coaching from a social constructionist platform does not ignore that particular "outcomes" are desired, however, particular attention will be paid to the processes that create them.

The purpose of the Deliver phase is to create and sustain success. Many of the coaching conversations will take place in the Deliver phase. Progress toward the goal will be reviewed during each coaching conversation. Each conversation will celebrate the successes and accomplishments that have taken place. Particular attention will be paid to opportunities to work or reframe challenges and setbacks.

Practices incorporated into the Deliver phase are too numerous to list and often include things that are created specifically for the Student based on something of importance in his or her life. Some of the practices would likely include doing reflective writing, creating a success journal and learning to reframe limiting beliefs.

Coaching as Relational Practice

In the beginning is the relation.

Martin Buber

Coaching goes beyond its definition as a profession or professional practice. At its core, coaching is purely relational. By beginning with the

relationship, rather than a defined process or particular outcome, we create a lens through which all that we do is framed. While I suggest particular coaching practices and exercises, these are always *in service of* the relationship. I have experienced all of these practices with my coaching-partners. I have had the privilege of co-creating insight, helping to re-author stories that no longer worked, and witnessing the achievement of personal goals. But these practices are only a sample of those that exist and of those that are waiting to be created.

The Between

Social constructionism places relationship, and relational practices, at the epicenter of what it means to be human. Martin Buber's particular way of being in relationship is highly relevant to coaching and coaching relationships. In coaching, the central relationship is that of personal presence, which Buber refers to as **I-Thou** rather than **I-It** (Buber as translated by Kaufmann, 1970). The kind of genuine dialogue, mutuality and relationship that exist within coaching can only take place from personal presence. It is to see the wholeness and possibility of my coaching partner in a way that transcends the temporal. William Blake, in his poem called, "Auguries of Innocence" captures the spirit of this well.

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an Hour.[14]

That is not to say that transactional conversation does not have a place in coaching dialogue. Appointments must be scheduled, requests are made and information exchanged. Genuine dialogue requires energy and not every moment of the coaching conversation holds transformational qualities. From a Buberian perspective it is not so much the "what" but the "how" that distinguishes **I-Thou** from **I-It**. It is the gravitational pull toward connection and relationship that generates personal presence. Coaching is not something to be "done to" another; rather it is a relationship that offers co-creation and reciprocity. All partners in the coaching relationship have the potential to be changed in this process. Buber refers to the unique place that is generated by personal presence as "the between."

"The between" plays a central role in coaching, as it is the space where relationship, meaning-making and coordinated change exist.

Small Shift – Big Difference

In my own coaching practice I've noticed an evolution in my language as it pertains to what is central to the discursive process called coaching. I've moved from noun (coach) to verb (coaching). In doing so, I've infinitely expanded the reach and potential impact of coaching. The conversation is no longer about an individual who carries a title or has a credential. Instead, we embrace the process of coaching and its potential for usefulness in practice. This has led me to a new set of questions:

- How can I create spaces for these particular ways of listening, speaking and knowledge generation?
- Which existing relational practices, traditions and vocabularies lend themselves to these conversations? Which get in the way?
- What do I need to move with confidence into coaching conversations that make a positive difference for my coaching partner – and for me?
- How can I learn to sense when the world is calling for me to engage in a coaching conversation?

By creating a set of coaching practices that are accessible, knowable and adaptable, we establish coaching as something that can be practiced across a broad range of human activities.

Social Construction and Coaching

Social constructionism is not a single, unified theory but it does have characteristics or themes that make it distinct and recognizable (Gergen and Gergen, 2003; Burr, 2003). A number of these are relevant to coaching:

- Knowledge is communally created

- All meaning is local and open to change

- Identity is created within relationship
- Language creates our world
- Stories shape our possibilities

Some of these characteristics reside comfortably in many coaching models; a few are unsympathetic to all but those with a social constructionist foundation. Each of these characteristics is explored from a philosophical stance in the Social Construction Chapter. In this chapter, I would like to discuss them in a practical way, the way in which they are lived out in coaching practice.

Knowledge is Communally Created

Knowledge is a social creation. It is constructed by people through the social and relational practices in which they engage (Gergen, 1999; McNamee and Gergen, 2006; Cooperrider et al., 2003). I have found this theme one of the more difficult to "wrap my head around." It sounds simple on its surface. But as I have delved more deeply into its implications, it has challenged things that I considered core to my humanity - my assumptions, beliefs and values.

I was born into a world that already existed. My world came with a set of boundaries and existing practices. My family spoke English – I speak English. I grew up in the conservative mid-west of the USA – my father worked, my mother stayed in the home to cook and clean, corporal punishment was considered proper parenting, and "good" children did not interrupt adults, did homework without being asked and washed the dishes. All of this knowledge about "how things worked" was passed on to me through ordinary conversations with, and actions taken by, the people in my life. More important, my assumptions about people and my view of the world were all formed by my social world. My parents chose to send me to a Missouri-Synod Lutheran school which shaped my beliefs about right and wrong, the concepts of heaven and hell, and the road to a moral and good life. This "transferred knowledge" was habitualized into my system of thought, my beliefs and my patterns of action. I did not question

these until I entered into new social worlds that included people who had different beliefs, assumptions and patterns of action. For many Students, college is the first time that they encounter people who are different. This can be both unsettling and a source of liberation.

All Meaning is Local and Open to Change

Things happen to people. I failed tests. My boyfriend dumped me (more than once). I got fired from my job at the ice cream packing factory. Each of these events had a real consequence. My grade was lower than I wanted. My heart was broken (at least temporarily). My ego was wounded and I needed to find a new source of income.

The meaning, my particular belief about these events, was constructed by and within my social group and expressed in language. In my social world, getting fired for any reason was not a good thing and was generally interpreted as some version of moral failing. For many years I was embarrassed by the fact I was fired from a job that I actually hated. I never talked about it unless "forced" into it by someone else. Even then, I focused on the "fact" that I moved to a better paying job within a week, letting the listener draw the conclusion that I had left voluntarily – without having to "say" it.

Today, the meaning of this event has completely changed for me. I understand it as a strong motivator – an image of an undesirable future that kept me in college when I was tired and frustrated. An event that helped me reframe setbacks as a catalyst for something new and better.

Belief is Not the Same as Truth

Social groups, people, determine what is considered acceptable to them. What is acceptable becomes codified into practice and shapes what becomes known as "truth." What is acceptable to one group may not be acceptable to another.

In my family, the practice of going to church on Sunday was optional. At my school, the practice of going to church on Sunday was mandatory. On

Monday morning when my teacher took a roll call of "church attendance" my family's *belief* ran smack into my school's *truth*.

Unfortunately, "the truth" often sets up irresolvable dichotomies. Martin Buber notes that people take comfort in yes-no and right-wrong dichotomies because they make life simple and understandable (Buber, 1970). It was easy for my teacher to gauge my "goodness" by counting the number of times I did, or did not, go to church. For my parents, and other sporadic church-goers, sitting in a church pew had little to do with being a good or moral person.

Managing multiple realities of "truth" when the stakes are high, for instance in conversations around social justice or religious beliefs, can be quite difficult. Social constructionism accepts that there are multiple, equally valid, truths operating simultaneously.

Power is the Dark Side of Knowledge

Philosopher Michel Foucault takes a darker view of practices that generate preferred knowledge and truth. Foucault links the construction of "truth" to power and control. To be a member of a group is to adhere to, and not challenge, the status quo. Groups reinforce their version of knowledge through proselytizing, education and enforcement (Foucault as discussed in Gergen, 2003).

In the preceding example, I very much wanted to live into my school's version of truth as exemplified by church attendance. I struggled on those many Monday mornings when I had to report "no" during roll call. What I did not understand at the time was how the social system, my school, used their dominant position to maintain a version of "truth" that was practiced through church attendance. Truth was reinforced in the following ways:

- Church attendance was reported publicly, in front of my classmates
- My ratio of good:bad (my attendance vs. all Sundays possible) was reported to my parents as part of my quarterly report card (as if they didn't already know?)

- Students with "perfect attendance" had their names written on a poster in the school's cafeteria/gymnasium
- Once a year, my family had a visit from members of our church to discuss "our goals" for attendance and our financial contribution to the church.

Identity is Created Within Relationship

"All people are the same. Some people are the same. No people are the same."

American Anthropologist, Clyde Kluckhohn (1948)

I am not my biology. For me, this was another challenging characteristic of social constructionism. My identity(ies) are assigned to me through social processes and I don't always get to choose the ones I like, or remove the ones I don't like.

There are specific ways in which my culture prefers to categorize and name elements about me: female, Caucasian, middle-aged, hetero-sexual, and mother. But none of these identities are the "essence" of me (Burr, 2003; Anderson, 1997).

There are as many potential identities as are created by, and embedded in, the conversations that surround me. One of the identities that my parents created for me was "smart."

> *The goals that parents set for their children also come into play from the earliest times: the father who wants his son to be a doctor or scholar will behave in a very different way from the father who desires an athlete……if a boy is wanted and a girl is born parents telegraph their feelings in a variety of ways….infanticide….treating the female child as a "tomboy" or giving her a masculine name….some parents encourage the use of imagination and fantasy, others demand literal truthfulness….* (Gardner, 1993)

Although I like to think of myself as "smart" I know that smart is not a measurable, tangible thing – but an identity. From as early as I can remember my parents told me that I was smart. My mother started reading out loud to me when I was very young and it was a particular source of pride for her that I could read her adult-level books by the time I was in 5th grade. My parents rewarded my school grades, a tangible sign of my smartness, with money. I *formed* and *performed* smart very well (Gergen in Anderson, 1997; Burr, 2003). It never occurred to me that I wasn't smart and this identity was readily available to me until I arrived at college and encountered college algebra and biology. Some of my college teachers did not bestow the "smart" identity on me.

Identities Change

Cultural conversations can be demanding and rigid. I am expected to live into an identity based on a set of shared expectations. Continuing with my previous example, what it means to be "smart" for instance, includes not one but an array of identities. I was expected to "act into" the appropriate identity based on the prevailing conversation surrounding smart linked to a particular age. As a five-year old I must know the alphabet. As an eight-year old I must read. By 12, I must use proper grammar. Children who don't do these things are "tested" and sometimes labeled (low-performer, learning disabled, etc.). As soon as I don't perform at the expected level (in college algebra, for instance) the availability of the smart identity is at risk to me.

There are, of course, alternate discourses. Rather than constructing smart (intelligence) as recitation of a set of facts, or performing language in a rote manner, we could choose to define it as the ability to sing a pitch-perfect note, console a friend in need, or hit a baseball out of the ballpark (Gardner, 1993).

Identities Constrict and Strangle

People experience themselves through identities that are concrete and real to them. People can become "trapped" in identities assigned to them by social communities, particularly when they are consistently reinforced by others. These lead to automatic actions that can be damaging.

At the opposite end of the spectrum of my personal example of living in to "smart" is the research on stereotype threat (Steele and Aronson, 1995). Stereotype threat is anxiety caused by the mere possibility that you might confirm a negative stereotype about your race or gender. Steele and Aronson's research showed that African American students scored lower when they thought the activity was measuring ability.

In other research conducted by John Bargh, a psychologist at Yale, people who were not old were "primed" to act into "oldness" by playing a word game that included words generally associated with undesirable constructs of aging such as frail, gray, weak, and decline. These individuals walked more slowly after the finishing the word game than people who were primed with neutral words such as chair, window, grass, or car (Bargh, 1996).

We cannot underestimate the power of socially-bestowed identities or their ability to hold in place when we want to move forward. In coaching, we should be mindful that Students may have identities that are less useful to them and of which they are not consciously aware. We can help them to locate alternate possibilities and choices that may be more useful to them. There are always more than two people in a coaching conversation, whether or not an embodied presence. Coaching exists within an inter-dependent network of social relations. It can be useful to ask*, "Who is speaking here? Who is listening? What voices are not being heard? Why is this particular voice dominant and not some other?"*

Language Creates the World

"The limits of my language are the limits of my world"

Ludwig Wittgenstein

Whether you are aware of it or not, you likely have an underlying belief about language and communication that governs your actions in the various situations you encounter. Most likely it is the "transmission" model of communication that I mentioned earlier in this chapter (Pearce, 2007).

This model makes it easy to find fault with the other and often leads to frustration.

Social construction centers language as a core process. Of particular interest is how people use language in everyday interactions; how they build accounts of events and how they manage the performative functions of language (Burr, 2003). Words then are central to the human experience, are by-products of social relationships and do not exist independent of the people who use them (McNamee, 1999; Anderson, 1997).

When I was a child and someone had hurt my feelings through taunts or teases, a well-meaning adult would say "sticks and stones may break your bones, but words will never hurt you." No doubt these adults were trying to be helpful, but they could not have been more wrong. Language, which includes all embodied activities, does things of consequence and has an afterlife. It does not take much effort for me to feel the sting of being called "fattie" or having my name called last (with rolling eyes) when selections were made for the kick-ball game. Conversely, one of the biggest regrets of my life has to do with a small candy, called a sweet-tart. In sixth grade many of the students in my class used these candies to inoculate themselves from the "cooties"[15] of one boy, named Stephen. This practice was so upsetting to Stephen, the child attached to the "cootie" game, that he ran away from school. He did not return to our school for 7th grade.

Speech Acts

Communication scholar, W. Barnett Pearce, offers us a distinctly different way to think about communication. He suggests focusing on three questions *(Pearce, 2007)*:

1. *"What are we making together?"*
2. *"How are we making it?"*
3. *"How can we make it better?"*

In answering these questions, Pearce draws on Austin's (1962) notion of "speech acts." Speech acts can be verbal and nonverbal. They include

many familiar language forms such as arguments, compliments and promises (Austin, J. L., 1962; Pearce, 2007). In my previous example, my friends and I were making something of consequence – today I would call it bullying. How did we make it? Through our verbal taunts, "You have Stephen's cooties" and our nonverbal practice of eating sweet-tart candies. How could we have made it better? The list here is too long to print but most assuredly could have included kindness and friendship. Pearce's work offers us a number of useful approaches to understanding language practices and how they impact relationships.

Stories Create The Past and Possibilities

Our stories form, inform and reform our sources of knowledge, our views of reality."

Harlene Anderson

People create and tell stories as a way to organize and give meaning to events, experiences and relationships (Gergen & Gergen, 1988; Aftel, 1996; Anderson, 1997). The stories that I tell, and that are told about me, serve to shape my identity. "My" story, then, is multi-voiced and represents a set of interlocking and overlapping narratives, but it is not "mine" alone (Aftel, 1997; Anderson, 1997).

One of the practices I often use in coaching is called a Life Map. I give you a roll of white paper about six feet long, a set of colorful markers and some very basic instructions. The instructions ask you to create a written narrative of your life that includes significant events and people. The map allows you to tell me your story.

What I've come to know is that stories are malleable. You can select to frame the same story in any number of ways. I told a version of my educational story in the prologue. I could have framed my story as a tragedy – how long and hard it was to complete my college degree, how many people stood in my way, and how much debt I accumulated by the time I finished. I could have framed my story as a hero's journey – how focused I was in the face of challenges, how I overcame obstacles and

became stronger for it, and how I landed the job of my dreams after graduation. Both stories are "true" but reframing the story as a hero's journey offers powerful possibilities. Because identities are shaped by the family and cultural conversations that surround them, students may have a need to re-author stories about their capabilities rather than diminish them.

Harlene Anderson reminds us that it is a tremendous responsibility to bear witness to another person's story. I must take great care in the "hearing and creating" process: how I talk with and about you; what topics I select for conversation and which I ignore; and, how I participate in the telling (Anderson, 1997).

Narrative, and in particular positive narrative, is one of the most powerful practices that we have available to us in coaching. Within any story that a Student may tell us, there exists strengths, relational resources and positivity. We have only to help find them and grow them.

The Power of Positive – Persistence Coaching

"He is able who thinks he is able."

Buddha

Appreciative inquiry's approach to questioning, positive framing and focus on strengths energizes the coaching process. This approach to Persistence Coaching has the following advantages:

- The coach is positioned as an active partner, not observer, in the process.
- The Student is embraced as a whole, functioning person with great potential.
- Inquiry reveals valuable material about what is possible and generates information that can be used in service of each student's quest to graduate from college.
- The deliberate bias to the positive activates energy and passion to fuel the changes that may be necessary for success.

- Reality is socially created and we can create a version of it that serves to support the Student.
- Language and story are used as performative sources of change – they are creative tools.

No Ultimate Truth

There is no ultimate truth to be discovered in Persistence Coaching. Rather, the Student's story is a context-bound social construction connected to a larger universe of relationships and stories. The student comes to the coaching relationship as a capable, whole, human being with strengths, successes and aspirations. Helping the student understand the "positive core" is central to the journey. An appreciative coaching model is not naïve. It recognizes that Students have real challenges to overcome in the goal to graduate college. But it does not define or label the Student as "the sum of their deficiencies." Rather it seeks to find theories, language practices, resources, processes and relationships useful to the Student in achieving his or her goals. The kind of discovery, insight and reflection embedded in the persistence coaching model is not linear. And no single source of knowledge is privileged.

Multi-Relational

Persistence Coaching conversations are not limited to those between Coach and Student. Given that knowledge-generation and identity construction are socially-engaged, inviting others in to the conversation is encouraged by design. For instance, the Student will be asked to gather a wide range of inputs from family, friends, teachers and others in their social system using an AI interview specifically designed for this purpose. Students will be encouraged to identify Learning Partners with whom they can share insights and receive ongoing feedback. They will be invited into Learning Circles with other Students, who can serve as peer-coaches. These relational elements are part of the Persistence Coaching and are neither incidental nor accidental.

Is Persistence Coaching Worth the Effort?

Waste of Human Potential

In the fall of 2011, more than 18 million people were enrolled in post-secondary institutions according to the U.S. Department of Education. Unfortunately, just over only half of them will graduate with a college degree within six years.[16]This trend is more disturbing when the data is disaggregated by income and first generation status. According to the Pell Institute[17] and based on 2003/2004 data:

- Only 44.4 % of low-income[18] students will graduate in six years
- Only 31.6% of low-income, first generation students will graduate in six years
- Bachelor-degree attainment within six years (compared to family income level)
    - 41.2% ($0 - $29,999)
    - 54.0% ($30,000 - $59,999)
    - 66.0% ($60,000 - $99,999)
    - 75.4% ($100,000 and above)

The link between poverty and college persistence seems strong.

Benefits of a College Degree

The individual benefits of attaining a college degree are clear. The College Board Advocacy & Policy Center reports the following benefits.[19] The lifetime earnings premium for a college degree is more than $1 million. In 2008, adults with a bachelor's degree earned about 81% more than a high school graduate.

Risk to the Country's Economic Viability

By 2018, 63 percent of all American job openings will require some sort of post-secondary education. It is estimated that employers will need 22 million workers with advanced education. At the current rate of graduation, the U. S. will be short by 3 million workers.[20]

A Public and Private Good

Taken together, I believe that the overwhelming response to the "worth" question must be a resounding 'yes.' For more than a decade I've worked in coaching relationships with adult professionals who want to co-create knowledge and expand identities. My hope and belief is that the processes that serve to support working adults will also help young adults succeed in college.

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[1] The following organizations' websites were reviewed for coaching definitions in October 2011: The International Coach Federation; The International Association of Coaching; American Society for Training and Development; Association for Coaching, Center for Creative Leadership; Graduate School Alliance for Executive Coaching; Society for Human Resources Management.

[2] From the ICF website http://www.coachfederation.org/icf-members/my-icf-membership/ last visited on 2/11/12.

[3] The authors noted the search criteria as follows. Databases used: Psych-Lit and ABI-Inform; date parameters 1989 – 1998; search terms = executive coaching. Articles appearing in more than one publication were only listed once.

[4] The author noted the research criteria as follows: Databases used: American Psychological Society, PsychINFO database, the Library of Congress database and the National Library of Medicine database. Author does not search terms; rather she specifies her search priority. 1. Historical beginnings of coaching; 2. Peer-reviewed literature categorized according to models and methods; 3. Link to research in similar helping professions; 4. Literature framed from view of the future of coaching.

[5] The author noted the search criteria as follows. Databases used: PsycINFO, Business Source Premier and Dissertation Abstracts International (DAI) ; no date parameter defined; search terms = executive, workplace and life coaching. Only scholarly peer-reviewed publications were included.

[6] From the ICF website http: //www.coachfederation.org, last visited 2/11/12.

[7] From the story, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, where after a race the Dodo Bird declares "All have won, all must have prizes."

[8] In October 2011 and again in January 2012, I did a series of searches using the Washington University Library databases. I began by searching for literature reviews on student departure and/or attrition and/or persistence using the Education dataset (Education Full Text, ERIC FirstSearch, Academic Search Premier). The result of my reading of these literature reviews is contained in this chapter.

I also searched both book and journal entries using the Education dataset described above. I performed iterative searches using the following search terms: 1. Academic Persistence and Student Attrition. 2. Coaching (performance) with Academic Persistence. 35 results were returned in search #2. More than half of these referred to coaching entry-level teachers as a form of job retention (persistence). The others pertained to athletic coaching, test preparation or career development for minorities. None were directly relevant to my topic.

[9] http://www.insidetrack.com/about/mission/

[10] GROW is an acronym that stands for Goal setting / Reality / Options & Obstacles / Way Forward. The GROW model for coaching is generally attributed to Sir John Whitmore PhD and is included in his book, Coaching for Performance.

[11] You may notice that the social constructionist coaching process uses a 5-D model rather than the 4-D model I discussed in the Appreciative Inquiry chapter. AI practitioners use both. I use the 5-D model in my coaching practice because it seems to flow more naturally in the one-to-one work in which I engage. I chose to use the 4-D model to introduce appreciative inquiry because it aligns with *The Appreciative Inquiry Handbook* co-authored with David Cooperrider, AI's developer. For examples of how both models are used in practice, please see The Appreciative Inquiry Commons, http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu.

[12] Appreciative inquiry is an elaboration of social construction theory. Both are fundamental to my coaching practice and Persistence Coaching. I will use these terms interchangeably unless I feel that a distinction between them is relevant to the point I am making.

[13] I am not the only, or first, person to have incorporated appreciative inquiry into professional development and coaching practices. In May 2007, The AI Practitioner (www.aipractitioner.com) devoted an issue to the topic of AI in coaching. The issue included articles by 12 authors discussing the use of AI coaching spanning many contexts such as in one-on-one engagements, large scale change initiatives and strategic planning. In the same year, Sara L. Orem, Jacqueline Binkert and Ann L. Clancy laid out a four-stage AI coaching in their book *Appreciative Coaching: A Positive Process for Change*.

[14] From the William Blake poem "Auguries of Innocence" published in 1863.

[15] I have no idea what a "cootie" is, but its power is strong to this day more than 40 years later.

[16] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2011, Enrollment component.

[17] Pell Institute 2003/04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study.

[18] Defined as Pell Grant eligible.

[19] Education Pays 2010: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society published by The College Board Advocacy & Policy Center.

[20] Georgetown University, Center on Education and the Workforce, 2010 p. 14. http://www9.georgetown.edu/grad/gppi/hpi/cew/pdfs/FullReport.pdf

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The magnitude of this issue, education poverty linked to financial poverty, in terms of social justice, unrealized human potential and the impact to the social fabric of our nation makes college persistence a significant and important topic. There are, however, a number of potential limitations to the ways in which coaching – in general – and Persistence Coaching – specifically – might be applied as currently described.

SOCIETAL CHALLENGES

COLLEGE READINESS DOES NOT BEGIN IN HIGH SCHOOL

Although the focus of my dissertation is a persistence coaching process anchored within the higher education system, readiness for the college experience begins well before a student steps on campus. There are indicators all along the way that tell us which children are likely to succeed and warn us about the ones who might not. Some of these things are visible to teachers, school administrators and parents.[1] For instance:

- Reading ability (by 2nd grade)
- Math scores (in 6th grade)
- Days spent in the classroom (linked to school calendar and absenteeism)
- Being held back to repeat a grade
- Failing math or English (in high school)

There are other factors that may be "sensed" by adults at school but are perhaps known only to children and the adults embedded in their home life. For instance, the reasons for changing schools or moving house to house; family stressors such as divorce, death of a loved one or abusive relationships; the need for a young adult to contribute financially to the family; and not having role models who can illuminate the path. Last, but perhaps most devastating, is the child's belief that the adults in his or her life just don't care.

Poverty is the Enemy of Education

The link between poverty and educational outcomes is quite clear[2]. Some of the data have been highlighted in this dissertation but it is only the tip of the iceberg. The cycle of poverty, sub-standard or limited education, and low-paying jobs is insidious and deeply rooted in this country's history.

Human beings are capable of generating knowledge and learning throughout our lifetimes. There is a "time" however when the structure and pace of our lives makes formal learning easier. Once a person begins adulthood, with its related responsibilities for home and child-rearing, it becomes much more difficult to sustain the time or energy needed for higher education. The result is that there are more than 40 million adults in the U.S. who have some college, but no degree.

Financial security provides individuals with choices – the wealthier I am, the more choices available to me. The pace of global and technological advancements predicts that those at the bottom end of the education continuum will continue to fall farther and farther behind economically. This will limit not only choices for the individual, but choices available to his or her family as well. It is easy to blame the individual. But this is neither fair nor useful. This negative outcome is socially generated through power and patterns of action; and the solution to it will also be socially generated. Educational poverty is a social justice issue but until it is constructed as such, no action will be sustained or strong enough to turn the tide

Challenges Specific to Coaching

Differences in the student population

It would be naïve to believe that a purely discursive approach to this issue will be sufficient to remedy such a long-standing and deeply rooted concern. As I've said earlier, I consider coaching and Persistence Coaching to be additive. It is not a replacement for adequate funding, support for enrichment studies in basic courses such as English and math, individualized career counseling and connection to a broader college social system. Following are some of the factors that should be taken into consideration when developing a personalized coaching approach for each student:

- Readiness for success in college courses (ACT scores and high school grades may be indicators, but there are two things that should be added: a portfolio approach to a student's work as suggested by Howard Gardner and an understanding of the student's explanatory style as suggested by Martin Seligman)
- First-generation status
- Financial status
  - Pell-Grant eligibility
  - A financial aid package that extends beyond the first year
  - The need to work – whether to contribute to college or as a supplement to the family income
- Social connectedness within the school

We know that there is a wide variance in institutional success in graduating low-income students even among schools with the same admission criteria. We need to study those institutions that do a good job of graduating low-income students to understand the factors that make them successful.

Life changes that affect the student

Other studies on this student population have indicated that the reasons for student dropout are often linked to life events. Because first-time college students are between the ages of 18 and 22 years of age, they are faced with all of the options available to young adults. These range from social choices surrounding drinking, sexual relations, marriage and child-bearing to feeling disconnected from family and home. While it is anticipated that the relational approach embedded within coaching will be a resource to students, it is clearly only one of many that might be attractive to them.

Coaching Process Success Factors

Because the coaches in Persistence Coaching may be drawn from stakeholders throughout the student's social world, they will come from a variety of backgrounds and philosophical approaches with varying levels of coaching experience. It is difficult to know with certainty the types of practices that will provide the most value to students. Drawing from the research I believe that each Persistence Coaches will be successful if they:

- Place *relationship* at the core of the coaching process (social construction)
- Enter the coaching conversation from a place of personal presence (Buber)
- Invoke the power of strengths and the positive core (Cooperrider, Fredrickson and others)
- Are confident that the process will work (Lowman, Seligman, Singer, & Luborsky)

Persistence Coaching is only one approach and there are likely many other practices that can be successful in this context. We cannot gauge the utility of Persistence Coaching to students until Students become active partners in the process.

Ethical Issues

The well-being of Students is primary. Any process envisioned for use with this population must make every effort to include protection measures. Students must enter into a coaching relationship freely and without coercion of any kind. Further, they must be allowed the freedom to stop coaching at any time, without fear of repercussion.

Students who participate in group sessions or in-class work cannot be anonymous. However, individual coaching discussions can, and must be, confidential. A written guideline for ethical considerations within coaching relationships will be provided to the Student by his or her Coach. If a student is under age 18, the consent form must be signed by a parent or guardian. Coaches will be expected to keep the Student's well-being in mind at all times.

What Might Come Next?

There is a building energy around the topic of college persistence in this country. In particular for low-income and first generation students; and for adults who have some college, but no diploma. Much of this discussion surrounds structural issues such as access to affordable and reliable funding, educational preparedness, and access to colleges that are well-matched to students' talents and interests. These are all important

conversations. Adding the concept of coaching, which has been used successfully by high-performing athletes and business professionals, is one more piece of a complicated puzzle. I have tried to bring together a set of issues in my dissertation and suggest Persistence Coaching as a way to benefit of low-income students in their goal to graduate from college. It is my hope that others will continue to build on this idea through dialogue and future research.

Persistence Coaching as Action Research

My dissertation is the beginning, rather than the end, of my learning journey as it pertains to Persistence Coaching and its utility in increasing the number of low-income students who graduate from college.

I held my first train-the-trainer session in June 2012 with 12 participants. The primary focus of this session was to learn about the ways in which strengths-based tools could be used with teens and young adults. In July 2012, I worked with several of those trained to introduce the concept of strengths to 30 low-income rising college freshmen. It is my hope that at this session I will find a small group of students who want to engage in a Persistence Coaching *Pilot Study* beginning in the fall of 2012.

To that end, I have started work on a Persistence Coaching Fieldbook that contains detailed information on the coaching practices that I highlight briefly in this dissertation. As a generative process, I know that all partners in the Persistence Coaching partnership will be able to add new practices and enhance the ones that I have offered. Reflective practice will be central to this objective.

The End is Just the Beginning

I would like to end this dissertation the way I began it, by challenging you to look for disparity and educational poverty in your community. When you find it, and I feel sure that you will, I challenge you to take an action, however small, to disrupt the system that creates barriers to education for the most vulnerable in our world – our children. As voters, tax payers and citizens we each have the power to disrupt the barrier at some level. If only we will.

[1] All of these factors were included, with citation, in the Education Chapter.

[2] Data on the link between poverty and college dropout rates is included, with citation, in the Education Chapter.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1

First-Generation College Graduates
Narratives of Success

An Invitation to Dialogue

(Graduate) and Sherry
A conversation conducted on:

Conversation

Name and Sherry

An Invitation

I have asked you to join me as a collaborator in my doctoral research study. The focus of my research is first-generation college graduates. In particular, I am interested in the processes that support college success for these individuals (resources, strategies, relationships, etc.) My research questions are:

How do first-generation college graduates

- manage around obstacles that they encounter
- leverage resources available to them
- expand discursive identities that could serve to limit their potential or achievement
- construct narrative(s) of their college-going experience
- bridge "old" and "emerging" identities with various social groups

As a first-generation college graduate I know that each experience is unique, but I am curious as to whether there might be similarities in the way first-gen's create success for themselves in college.

There is no preparation needed for our conversation. What follows is a ***draft*** set of questions designed to be conducted in a 60 to 90 minute conversation. It is my initial contribution to inquiry but I invite you to add questions on things that are of interest to you.

An Outline for Conversation – The Questions

- Without being humble, describe what you value most about:
  - Yourself
  - The way you've navigated your college experience
  - Your contribution (past, present and future) to the world
- Think back to the moment when you saw yourself attending and graduating from college. What were some of things that attracted and excited you?

- What did you hope for or envision as a result of this accomplishment?

- In your college journey, you probably experienced ups and downs, twists and turns, high points and low points. For a moment I'd like you to think about a "high point."
    - Please tell me a story about this "high point" experience for you.
    - What made it a high-point experience?
    - What most surprised you?
    - What was it about **you** that made it successful?
    - What did **other people** in your life (family, friends, teachers) do that contributed to the experience?

- In thinking about your success in graduating from college, how was the journey similar to, or different from other successes you've had in your life?
    - What are the core elements that must be present for you to describe something as "successful"?
    - What role do relationships play in transforming events into successes?

- Thinking broadly about the expanse of your life, describe a time when you have experienced an event that transformed you in some way. Tell me a story about this time – what was happening and who was involved?
    - What made it transformational for you?

- In what ways did this transformation change you?
- In what ways did this transformation change your relationships?

- Personal identity – the way you see yourself and the way others see you – is woven from a broad array of factors. In considering your college journey is there a moment that stands out for you as a turning point in seeing yourself in a new way? Describe this moment for me, what was happening and who was involved?
  - What was the outcome?
  - What do you value most about this moment?
  - What difference has this made in your life?

- As you consider the significant changes that you have experienced in yourself
  - What makes you feel most proud about the changes you have experienced?
  - How have these contributed to the person you are today?
  - How will these contribute to the person you want to become?

- If a friend asked you to share the wisdom you gained in your college-going experience with them - what would you tell them?

- Imagine that you fall into a deep sleep tonight and don't wake up for three years. While you are sleeping a miracle has happened and your life has become everything that you wanted it to be. You feel elated. As you awaken and open your eyes what do you see happening that is new, positive, and different? How do you know – what is happening, what are people saying and doing?

- Is there anything else that you wished I had asked you, but did not?

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BIOGRAPHY

Sherry Harsch-Porter was born in St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.A. She completed a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration at Southeast Missouri State University graduating magna cum laude in 1980. She completed a Master of Arts degree in Human Resources Management at Washington University (St. Louis) in 1993. From 1994 to 1996 she was enrolled in Ph.D. studies in the Public Policy Analysis Program at Saint Louis University. Sherry received her Ph.D. in Social Sciences from Tilburg University in 2012.

Sherry founded The Porter Bay Group, Inc., an executive development and business consulting firm, in 2000. Prior corporate experience includes AT&T, SBC Communications and DuPont. Over her corporate career, Sherry held positions in a wide variety of functions including Finance, Information Technologies, Corporate Development, International Marketing, and Human Resources.

Sherry teaches graduate-level courses at Washington University; is a frequent speaker at national and regional conferences and is published in a number of professional journals. She is a contributing author to the coaching reference book "The Handbook of Knowledge-Based Coaching: From theory to practice" published by Wiley in 2011.

Sherry serves on the Steering Committee for St. Louis Graduates, an organization focused on increasing college graduation rates for low-income youth in the St. Louis region. She lives with her husband, Keith, in Webster Groves, Missouri. Together they have two sons, Zachary and Alex.